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MOSES
THE LORD OF THE PROPHETS

By the Same Author

WHERE BONDS ARE LOOSED
THE MAINLAND
SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT
ENGLISH COUNTRY
THE DESERT HORIZON
DAIMON
INNOCENT DESIRES

MOSES

THE LORD OF THE PROPHETS

BY
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To
T. STURGE MOORE

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MOSES: THE LORD OF THE PROPHETS

CHAPTER I

THE FLIGHT FROM EGYPT

I

A MAN and a laden ass are resting in the shadow of a rock during the mid-day heat —no green plant, no sound, not even the buzz of an insect's wings.

Moses is in the early prime of life, swarthy with reddish-black hair and beard. He wears the tunic and short kilt of an Egyptian noble, though over this, to protect him from the heat, hangs the abbas of a Bedawy. At his back are bow and quiver: at his side is a sword. The ass stands near him in the shadow, with lowered head and neck out-stretched; its burden, a goatskin of water and a laced bundle, lies at their feet.

To the right are broken strata of sandstone. Beyond, higher, are immense cliffs of darker granite; behind these the mountains rise into a turquoise haze against the pale edges of the sky. To the left is a plain of dull cinnamon colour.

An intense stillness reigns. The sun parches the bare rocks. Light and silence mingle as in eternity. Each moment seems no part of changing life, but is fixed in stillness.

Eight days Moses has been travelling in the desert—already he has forgotten their number. But to himself, in this still desert, he is no longer a man amongst men; he has become a core of consciousness, adrift in a bright æther, a vortex self-revolving on the fringes of eternity.

From under his heavy brows he looks back across the plain whence he has come. Above its garment of quivering heat is the reflected mirage of the mountains, hanging in the sky. He scans the scene; yet, in his eyes, sight is turned inward, as he would find within himself as deep a timelessness. Like an iridescent film, memories are stretched across the silence; their colours change, quicken and fade; they dim the inner vision, carrying him back into Egypt.

Past scenes are again before his eyes.

He sees frescoes, blue and white, with spiral and wave patterns on the ceiling, blue, yellow and red on the walls, and the refined, complaisant figure of the princess, Thermuthis, fresh from her toilet and attired by her hand-maiden for the day. She extends her hand, asking in an indolent

fashion the reason for his call, and his desire for privacy.

Ashamed, he recalls the inadequacy of his protest against the oppression of his people. He had seen her amused surprise. He had been blunt; told her he wished no longer to accept the shelter of her house, had talked of justice and right between men and nations. She had laughed and bidden him speak on. He was free to go and live amongst slaves, she said, if he were so minded. Did he wish to seek her advice on the wisdom of exchanging his commission in Pharaoh's army for the rank of slave in a labour gang? Had the suns of the desert made him mad?

He thought of the high dunes of the sandy desert; like waves, like the power of Egypt, they were vast, shadowing symbols. It were easier to smooth those hills into bare plains than to bring justice between nations. The energies of nature were beyond the power of individual man. Mankind itself, mankind in the mass was like a pyramid, sitting heavy and square upon the land; the might of Egypt was all-pervading, stretching north and south, not to be altered.

She had mocked, speaking of the greatness of fate in his mien. Passionately he bade her listen, and spoke of the uprisings amongst the slaves; named his own history as an instance of the oppres-

sion. Could he remain passive and not take part in the struggle? Her laughter had ceased. "If Menephtah," she had warned him, "were Pharaoh, then your action might be mere folly and not dangerous, for he is easy and indolent, but the jackals have already been barking at the heels of the lion Rameses, and he is angry. He will suppress the mutinies, and you had best take care."

Then he had left her, but not before she had softened into raillery. "Farewell, my boy, be wise in time," she had said, "and don't imagine because you were pulled out of the water in a slave's basket, that you, like the great Amenophis, can press your hand on the histories of men as on wax."

He had wandered far from the city; without a plan, he had trudged over the sand-dunes in the bitter heat of the sun. On one side was the sea, and on the other a chain of shallow lakes, formed by straying waters from the Pelusiac Nile. About them marsh plants, and here and there along their edges patches of cultivation. Suddenly he had heard the calling of a man in pain and the oaths of a man in anger.

In the distance were groups of men working with hoes; they were in lines, one behind another, and to judge from their movements, which were undisturbed and regular, they did not seem to hear the cries which came from close at hand. Till that moment he had thought he was alone, but now, waking from

his inner contemplation and desire, he had walked towards the place whence the cries came.

An Egyptian was beating an Israelite. The slave was clutching his hoe, and while the Egyptian struck with his whip, the man, as though in an ecstasy of anguish and debasement, was making efforts to continue his work. He cried out each time the whip fell, yet striving to show willingness to obey, he plied his hoe in desperate eagerness.

“Hold. Why do you strike that man?”

The Egyptian paused, astonished, and turned an angry face. “He is mine to beat. My slave.”

“Yours! He is not yours to abuse.”

“He is my slave to do with as I wish,” said the Egyptian, his anger rising. “And should he not work, I would cut off his hands or his head.”

“Oh monstrous degradation that he should not resist. And you, too, you dog, are degraded in beating him.”

Again the whip cut at the slave, who, agape, was crouching in wonder.

He had run between the two, unarmed save for his exceeding wrath. “Strike not again if you have heed for your life.”

“Out of my way, madman!” And the Egyptian laid hand on his sword.

“Quick, give me your hoe.” Stretching an arm, he seized the man’s hoe, wrenched it from

him. . . . It crashed on the head of the Egyptian. No need for a second blow.

Under the burning sunlight, he turned to the trembling slave. There was silence, then with quick glances they looked round to see if the deed had any witness. No one was in sight.

"As you value your life, keep silent. Help me to carry him yonder where there is sand. Take his feet. I will carry him by the head."

In the dunes they had buried him.

"He died swiftly, a dog's death," he had said. "You had best go to the lake and wash your hoe. Is there any man who knew he was in this field?"

"No man, my lord," answered the slave.

"Then see to it that you tell none. And now go your way in peace."

He had stood watching while the slave went to the water and washed his hoe, then with hurried steps had gone back to the city of Rameses.

II

Moses, as he rests under the shadow of the high rock, thinks of the story of Joseph, who, because of the envy and injustice of his brothers, was cast into a pit. Yet Joseph did not complain of destiny; he became the master of that envy and injustice. So it would be with the Children of Israel; they would be lords over oppression. Israel is like

wheat, which, cast into the earth, lies hidden in darkness; in time it shall be raised up as ears of corn.

After he had killed the taskmaster he had shunned his father's house lest he should bring danger, and mixed with the Egyptians as in the past. Yet had his heart led him back amongst his own people, and on the second day it chanced that he passed where two Israelites were striving together. He had said to the one who was attacking the other: "Wherefore do you smite your fellow?" The man turned on him a sneering face and answered: "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?" At these words he had been afraid, for he knew that the thing was known.

He heard men talking, saying that the body of the friend of Rameses had been found buried in the sand—that it was supposed some slave had killed him, and that Pharaoh was moved to great wrath. So he had sought a solitary place, and waited in hiding till the evening.

At night he had approached secretly the hut of Amram, his father, and standing at a little distance, had called. Miriam and Aaron came out to him. He touched their hands in the darkness, and whispering, told of his deed, and of how both Israelites and Egyptians were speaking of the event.

Miriam said: "You have done well," and kissed him, but Aaron said: "Not so well, I think. Much trouble for us if it becomes known. If you would save yourself, go into the desert. Go, and do not return. Pharaoh is already angry because of the mutinies, and this will be the occasion of greater afflictions." Aaron had spoken quickly, emphatically; he had clutched him by the arm, then raised his hands in anguished protest. "I said, do only what is practical. Help your father's house. Use your influence with the Egyptians—but now—Oh folly, to kill the friend of Pharaoh! Alas! that such wild blood should run in your veins!"

He had felt Miriam's hand seek his in the darkness, as she had answered. "What has been done was ordained by fate. Had he not struck to kill, he had not been tested. Through the violent deed shall come understanding." To him she said: "Fly now into the desert. Go, that you may return greater than yourself." Then in a louder voice to Aaron, speaking as the mistress of the house: "Fetch your ass that is grazing in the field of Lamech, that our brother may ride on his journey. I will make food ready. This night he must be gone from the land."

He felt shame at the futility of his action, which only brought risk to others. His weakness was manifest. This was his poverty. He had wished

to save his people, but must leave them and hide in the desert. He said to Aaron: "Forgive me that I bring this danger and trouble."

"It is best to go," said Aaron. "Wait here a little, while I fetch the ass."

He had entered the hut with Miriam, but had not spoken to his parents of his departure. She prepared food, and in a little while Aaron returned.

III

In the solitude of the desert, and in that silence which seemed unbreakable, Moses was ceasing to think as he was wont to think. As he scanned the bare landscape under the sinking sun, the perception of outward things became the counterpart of his visions. His body seemed like a river-bed in which influences from all he had known and from all that was still unknown were as rolling water. The floods were moving when he thought they were still, and they were still when he thought they were running. On the surface, swirling and floating with the stream were memories, sticks and dried leaves on the current. . . . And again he seemed to be on a narrow bridge; on each side was danger. The world fell apart in two halves; on the one side were the things outside of him, and on the other, pictures of things within, and both were luring him to disaster.

A soldier in the army of Rameses, for two years Moses had served on the frontier fortress of Azarek, had marched through the limestone deserts of the north, and there encountered the contingents of slaves sent from Goshen for punishment. With the eye of memory, he saw again the Egyptian soldiers marching in columns of fours, with their haversacks, their bows, the short quivers of arrows and their swords at their sides. There followed the slaves, heavily laden with the stuff of the camp, and beside them the drivers with their long whips. A blaze of heat and light from the limestone. . . . The men marched with slow, swinging steps, only the slaves under their burdens uttered grunts like animals.

There had been insurrections among the subject peoples; orders had been given that they were to be kept moving from place to place. Men suspected of rebellion were marched to the desert fortresses. The drivers dealt harshly, and if men fell and died it mattered not. His people were enslaved, despised, clothed in poverty. . . . He had heard their screams from under the lash. . . .

On those roads were few landmarks. A heap of stones marked where some Bedawy was buried; a boulder was a feature to provoke comment, and a bush of flowering broom would be to the soldiers like some familiar milestone, marking their journey.

He thought of his teacher, Amenches, in the university of On, a man who had never felt the hardships of a soldier's camp, nor penetrated far into the desert, but had lived a life of ease on the rich, black soil of the Nile. Yet he knew that the mild scholar cherished in secret, and at the risk of his life, the heresy of Akhnaton, believing in one only god, ruling the world, who would give justice to all peoples.

He saw the waste land outside the city of Rameses, where the slaves were camped. They had been gathered at the command of Pharaoh from Goshen, from Zoan, and from many towns in the northern delta. They had come with their families and their possessions that they might build storehouses and dig canals. The long rows of squalid huts appeared through a red and yellow haze to his inner vision.

Constantly his soldiering had taken him among the labour-gangs. Some worked in pits, digging stiff clay; others mixed and kneaded with hands and feet, shaping it to moulds; others stacked bricks to dry in the sun; others wheeled trolleys from the fields to the store-houses.

There had been nothing unusual in what he had seen, yet it had changed his life. Israelite slaves were receiving punishment. Four men and one woman were hung by their hands from a wooden scaffold. One of the taskmasters was slashing at their exposed bodies with a leathern thong.

The men writhed and screamed, but the woman did not seem to feel pain. On her face was a proud and exalted expression. Her eyes met his, and she seemed to look at him with a personal significance from out the tangle of black hair which hung about her face and shoulders. The whites of her eyes showed in a ring round the iris. Her lips were slightly apart.

The Egyptian with his whip finished his task; the slaves were loosed from the scaffold. The men tottered and moaned, touching with finger-tips their weals and scars. The woman was the firmest on her feet. She offered her hand to one of her companions.

Like the men who had been flogged, Moses himself, as he stood watching, had trembled; and had looked on the Egyptians with a sudden loathing.

IV

As the sun sank, Moses rose to continue his journey. A wall of mountains stood before him, the plain behind was a lake of darkening purple. Leading his ass by the bridle, he followed a narrow track over the foot-hills. In the fading twilight memories of his past weighed upon him, like a burden he must carry into a yet more distant place.

The Palace of Pharaoh rises before his eyes; he thinks of its life flowing smoothly with monotonous

luxury:—hunting parties, feasts, dancing girls and singers, the elaborate and formal ritual of the temples.

On a night of full moon, he had left the banqueting hall and gone to the river-wall. From the ramparts he had looked down on the Pelusiac Nile, shining like a sword-blade on the dark earth. Slowly it flowed past the city, eastward towards the marshes and the sea. He had been aware that a figure was crouched in the shadow of a wall. Whether it were man or woman he did not heed, but stood looking on the Nile and the open country beyond. He had felt drawn towards the shining river, wished to be upon its bank where water and land met.

Down the steps . . . under the archway of the river-gate . . . past the watchman with his lanthorn. . . . Twice he thought he was followed, had paused, listened and continued on his way. At the river's edge he looked at the moonlight flickering on the surface, then followed a narrow path towards the sea.

The figure had moved beyond him, and, as he approached, stepped from the reeds and stood in his path. With a quicker beating of his heart, he saw the woman who had looked at him from her scaffold of punishment.

“Moses, do you not know me?”

“I think I should know you.”

“Indeed you should.”

“But I cannot name your name.”

"I am Miriam, your half-sister. I was named Miriam, The Bitter, because of the persecution of our people." She had come nearer, and looking at him intently, spoke in a manner, which though strange in itself, seemed natural to her. "When I was a child, I dreamed a dream. In the night I saw a man clothed in fine linen, and he said: 'Tell your father and your mother, that what is born to them this night, will be cast on the waters, and by him the waters shall be divided and become dry. Through him shall wonders be performed, and he shall save Israel and be their leader for ever.' This dream I told, but they would not believe. To save you from the servants of Pharaoh, your mother put you in an ark and cast you on the water, and you were saved."

"Tell me more," he said. "Show me a sign."

She raised her head to meet his eyes with a challenging look. "See here, on my arms, my breast and my back where their whips have fallen. . . . I speak of freedom to Israel. Some heed me, others mock." She paused, then in a gentler tone: "My brother, whom as a child I called Yered, because I went down to the river after you to know what your end should be, you are to be the deliverer of our people, you are to save us from the oppression of the Egyptians. They have decreed a great bitterness against Israel.

They have taken us from the land of Goshen, where in peace we tended our flocks, and have used us as slaves. They have thrown the male children into the rivers, lest we should increase too fast, for they have said to Pharaoh: "They are more than we." They have told the midwives to strangle the children at birth. You, too, they would have killed had not Pharaoh's daughter taken you under her protection. You are one set apart. Take heed and know in time."

"Who am I? I have lived as the Egyptians, while my countrymen have laboured. I am the least among them."

"Listen and I will tell you what the gods have done."

"Speak not of the gods. In Egypt there are too many gods."

"When the Israelites heard the command of Pharaoh to throw the male children into the rivers, some of the people separated from their wives, while others remained with them. At about the time of child-birth the women went out into the fields, and the gods of our ancestors, who had sworn to multiply them, came and washed the children and rubbed them with salt, and placed in their hands two stones, from one of which they sucked milk and from the other honey, and when the children could walk they returned to their fathers' house. . . . And when the Egyptians saw

that the gods had compassion on our people, they tried to take them, but the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the children to keep them from harm. Then the Egyptians brought their ploughshares and they ploughed over them, as the spoiler in harvest time, but though they ploughed never so hard, they were unable to injure them."

To this fable in which the hearts of a simple people had found comfort, he could say nothing, but asked: "Are my father and my mother living?"

"Yes."

"Here in this town?"

"Yes."

"Then take me to them."

"Did you never think of us?"

"Yes. . . . Maybe. . . . I have lived divided. . . . I have been restless. . . . I have been waiting."

He watched her thoughts behind the immobility of her face. She turned, and, pushing aside the reeds, led the way.

As he had followed, his fate had seemed no longer to falter. . . .

His ass was stumbling in the darkness and holding back from the steep ascent. It was best to wait till the dawn. On a ridge between two valleys

he loosened the girth, and the tired beast lay down to rest.

Now that the hoofs no longer struck on the rock all was still. The desert, like a petrified ocean, was around him in the darkness. Wrapped in his cloak, he sat gazing into the night.

He hears his father's voice:

"My son, if you are indeed he, you are welcome home. . . . My son, whom I named Heber, because for your sake I was joined again to my wife, you are welcome."

The hut to which Miriam has led him is a single cell with door-lintel so low that they must stoop to enter. On a bracket a rush lamp is burning, its reddish flame flickering to a wisp of smoke. At the back is a raised clay platform with grass mats. On this broad bed squat, with crossed legs an old man and a woman. . . . Against one of the walls Aaron leans.

Amram is grown old before his time; his eyes are blinded by a disease very common amongst the poor. He puts out his hand and catches the hand of his son, clutching eagerly with thin fingers. "These are ill days for Israel. . . . And an ill time when Pharaoh commanded the male children to be thrown into the rivers. Yet you escaped death, and now are returned to us."

"My father, had I known that you were alive, I would have come sooner. I knew not till this hour." He kisses his father on both cheeks, then gives his hand to his mother and kisses her.

That she should look sick and thin, that her eyes should be partially blinded, that she should have long prominent features and scant grey hair, does not seem other than natural. She does not feel the constraint which the men feel.

"I have always said that you would return. . . . Many's the time I have told them so. . . . These fingers wove for you the ark of rushes. . . . I followed to where Pharaoh's daughter found you. . . . My breasts gave you suck. . . . You knew your mother's pap. . . . You turned from the Egyptian nipple and would have none of it. . . . You cried in a rare temper till they brought me to you. . . ." And so on in a stream of words.

While she is talking, Miriam brings bread and wine and sets them before him. She pours fresh oil into the lamp, then, leading him to Aaron, says: "This is Aaron, your brother, by whose labour we live."

He sees a man a few years older than himself, slight in build, with keen critical eyes, and thin wispy beard, with long side-curls after the fashion of the Israelites—not a labourer in the pits, but perhaps a clerk or household slave.

His mother plucks him by the sleeve. "Sit here beside me, and I will tell you the story of past times." He tastes the coarse bread and the thin, sour wine. Henceforth such will be his fare rather than the rich delicacies of the Egyptians. While he listens to his mother, he is aware that Miriam is watching him; yet he does not look at her, but at the lamp and its flickering, smoking flame, and the floating piece of twisted rush on which it feeds. . . . The old people, his parents, are like the piece of rush, nearly burnt up. If his father and mother are the twisted wick, Miriam is the flame with its cap of smoke.

She holds him by her silence. After she has brought the bread and wine, she goes into the darkest part of the hut. Though he cannot see her, he remains aware of her upright, resolute body, of her bare feet planted on the clay floor, of her regular breathing.

Sometimes his father questions him about his life among the Egyptians. He answers reluctantly.

His parents are talking, yet he can think only of Miriam, who sways from side to side in the shadow. Sudden and harsh her voice comes dividing an interval of silence:

"Enlarge thy tents, O Israel ! Awake, put on strength.

"Shake thyself from the dust. Loose the bands from off thy neck, O captive.

"Thou hast sold thyself for nought; and shalt be redeemed without money."

She comes forward into the open space near the lamp and with a quick beating of his heart, he rises to confront her. Lifting her hands towards him, she speaks again.

"Behold, O Israel, he has come. Awake, hearken to me. Look upon the rock whence ye are hewn.

"Behold, he shall take thee up out of the land of bondage, into a land of milk and honey."

She lets her hands fall to her sides, looking past him; then, in a voice gentler and folded in prophetic sadness, she continues:

"Because of the discontent of thy heart, as an ox at the wheel turns always about the well, he shall lead thee far from the springs of comfort.

"Thy generations shall fall as a beast that is sacrificed; their blood shall be their redemption.

"He shall bring deliverance which shall take away the life of the indolent, and break the legs of them that cannot climb.

"He shall make the mountains the threshing-floor of the nation, and in the desert he shall reveal the shining of a great light."

She comes towards him, and raises her hands stiffly, as though lifting some invisible weight that she would thrust forward and let fall at his feet. She stands with hands uplifted, utters an inarticulate sound of distress, and then as though bereft of strength, sinks to the ground.

What are these demands? The voice of a mad woman, or the voice of a prophetess? Never did the priests in the Egyptian temples speak with such faith. Aaron's eyes are upon him, narrowed and watchful. So has he seen the priest's eyes at the tense moment of sacrifice, watching for a sign from the moving entrails. The warm air of the hut presses on his temples. He longs for the freshness of the night. It was cool by the riverside where he had met Miriam, but here it is suffocating in the smoky air under the low roof. "Who am I? I am nothing," he falters. "I know not what you mean." In the blind eyes of his father there is no response; his mother's seem full of an unsustaining hope. Aaron he dares not face.

Moses looked round on the grey waste of the wilderness; his hands were clenched; he was aware of a peculiar strength in his limbs; he needs no sleep, but will wait watching till the dawn.

Out of the darkness came the rushing of a wind; it breathed in a deep exhalation across the arc of the firmament; it grew in strength, was a spirit in distress; then sighed and declined, and, as suddenly as it had arisen, ceased, as though escaping through open shutters into the heavens. Moses lay back and rested his head against the earth. Across the dome of the sky, he traced the band

of the milky way patterned as by the laying of pale spider's webs one on another; through them dark pits were hollowed; his thoughts lost themselves therein, returned from that distant darkness, and formed themselves again into shadows following him from Egypt.

Wherefore was he thus flying from the wrath of Pharaoh? Merely to save his life? Miriam had said that he was going that he might return. . . . Why this pain at his heart in parting from people whom he had hardly known? All his life he had waited to know them, and now each day's march took him further from them. He was leaving them, slaves in danger of their lives and crushed under heavy burdens.

As he left the hut of his father, a faint grey in the eastern sky had revealed the earth in its darkness. Aaron had followed and plucked him by the arm. With what mingled feelings he had heard his brother's speech: shame at his own thought, yet in that shame a scorn for one who had been all his life a slave.

"A word with you, please. . . . I have said nothing, I have only listened." Aaron's speech had been rapid and with the emphasis of a lifted shoulder or of gesticulating hands. His small eyes from between contracted lids watched sharply, his ringlets shook with the quick energy of his

utterance. "Our sister, you see what she is: a woman shaken from beyond. She has brought trouble. . . . On her account my task has been made hard. . . . She stirs the people. They do not pause to think, to ask themselves what her words mean. She speaks of breaking the bondage of the Egyptians. . . . But how is that possible? . . . Listen to me!" Aaron had come a step nearer, and his upturned face had been more clearly visible. "Do you know how many of the children of Israel have died, have been killed, if we're truer to say, by the work in the brickfields? Eight hundred and more in six weeks of this summer. . . . They were worked to death. . . . Very well, and why was that?"

In his mind, Miriam's words were leaping like a shoal of fish in an unquiet pool, and he could not speak to Aaron, who after a pause answered his own question. "Because of the mutinies, as the Egyptians call them. But it was mostly the old people and the sick who died, those who could not stand the hard work in the sun. . . . And yet, you see that our father and our mother are still alive. How do you think that is?" He had paused again. "Because they were left in peace in their house, and did not have to work in the fields. . . . It was not Miriam who saved them. She caused herself and others to be beaten.

. . . Some were beaten to death. No, it was I," he spoke more rapidly, "because I work hard, because I make myself useful. I know the Egyptians, as you no doubt know them; they are not all harshness. Very well, there is skilled work which I can do, which they appreciate. I have found favour with the taskmasters . . . our parents are left in peace. I do not boast unduly when I say that it is because of me that they are still living."

He ~~had~~ ^{had} the keenness of his brother's glance, felt the inward conflict of shame at his own pity for the victim of his scorn. Such eagerness, so circumspect a pride and such habitual caution! Then, as he was still silent, Aaron had whispered: "If it were possible to break our bondage, what man among us would hold back? To be free again, as we were in Goshen! But first we must live, and to live, must know how to move the hand to the mouth. A man must see what is possible, and do that."

He asked: "What is your work?"

"I am one of the chief assistants of Aziru the Amorite, a worker in metals. In his workshops are made the finest and costliest drinking cups. He has with him many workers in silver and gold. Even the figures of the gods are made in his workshops. I am not unskilled with my hands and am a worker in precious metals."

"On that account you are privileged?"

"On that and others. I use my position, so far as I am able to help our people."

"You wish them to be free?"

"In our hearts, which of us does not? It is not wishing that makes the event, but work and skill, and not least, unobtrusiveness. It is better not to be noticed, but needed."

In answer to his questions, Aaron had told of his youth, how he had worked always, being useful to those above him, humble and ready. The reed which bends to the wind is left to grow by the river, while the date-palm is broken. "Who would not wish for deliverance? It will not come idly by the way of words."

"No, but by deeds."

At that saying Aaron's eyes had narrowed in suspicion, and he added in a lowered voice: "Be not influenced by Miriam and her wild words. She dreams, and lives in her dreams; she is like one, who, longing for rain, sees in every cloud a thunderstorm. Who are you to set yourself up against the power of Egypt? She speaks only of her dreams. It is true you are adopted by one of Pharaoh's daughters, but what is that? Of Pharaoh's daughters there are scores. He has more than a hundred sons, and of daughters he knows not how many." Aaron had waxed hot and eager. "What power have you," he demanded, "to

save Israel ? And why, because a woman speaks wild words, should you be able to overthrow the established might of Egypt ? It is not possible." Aaron had come nearer, and had said with sly penetration : " I have watched and I have seen in your eye the same look as in Miriam's. Dreaming, she looks on fancy, not on the world. I am afraid lest by some rashness you bring danger to this house which I have kept alive. Tell me, what do you think you can do ? "

He had resented his brother's penetration, been ashamed of his own weakness, and had kept silent under a growing weight.

Aaron's voice was persuasive in a hurried whisper. " This you can do, if you are wise. Being, as you are, favoured by the Egyptians, doubtless having the ear of those in authority, you can make lighter the burden that I have found heavy."

" Can a man stay the stars in their courses, or silence the oracle at Thebes ? " The words had come against the saner judgment of his mind.

Aaron turned aside and shook his head, then, as though compelled to argue with a child, " You are younger than I, and know not adversity, as I know it. There are hundreds amongst us who would lead us back into Canaan if that were possible. This dream is known to our people. To you also that wish has come, for I saw, that, when Miriam spoke, you were thrilled. It is a holy thought that

has lived in the minds of older and wiser men. . . . You have not felt the weight of the might of Egypt; and when you cried out, saying that you were nothing, and that you knew not what she meant, I divined in your heart another thought, and I was afraid, for I knew that you were crying out against a voice in your own heart, that might lead you to endanger the lives of us all."

With sudden irritation he had said: "Why do you say this? Why guess at my thoughts?"

Remember what men are like: difficult to be satisfied in the mass. You may do much for your father's house, yet little for the nation."

He had remained silent. He had never doubted his brother's sincerity. On those keen features, which in the half light appeared slightly wizened, he saw the stamp of oppression; yet this man had faced life's difficulties, and was not to be despised. Could he, in like circumstances, have done so well? Was there not need for caution? Was not the whole adventure of the night fantastic and extravagant? Yet how feeble was caution compared with the deeper pulse which answered Miriam! Yet as Miriam was his sister, so was Aaron his brother; their claims were in his blood from of old, not only from that night of meeting.

He had taken Aaron's hand, told him that he was glad that he had spoken. "Of myself, I know not

yet. This night has been a night of marvels. . . . I only know that from this hour, I am of my father's house; no longer will I live with the Egyptians. You have done well, and I have done nothing. I will go now, but before long I will return."

Aaron would have spoken again, but he had turned and gone rapidly away. As he went in the dawn through the city where the slaves were stationed, he had seen the long lines of the huts of the Children of Israel, and the barracks beyond on the hill-side where soldiers and taskmasters were housed; had seen the half-completed granaries and the roads which led thither from the brickfields. The oppression of his people had become suddenly familiar, as though he himself had lived in servitude.

After a night of watching, Moses rose and loaded his ass. He set forward southward towards the sea; he would follow the sea's edge till he was past the valleys of the copper and turquoise mines, where the Egyptians worked; he would go further to the big open valley of Rephidim, then striking inland he would follow the valley to the mountain; perhaps he would find hospitality amongst the highland tribes. His fate was to be a stranger amongst strange people—this bitter fate to leave his own whom he had found.

CHAPTER II

IN MIDIAN

I

A SQUARE altar of loose stones had been built before the tent of Yahweh in the wilderness. On it was heaped dry brushwood ready for kindling. The tribe of Reuel, the Midianite, was gathered for the burnt offering. The sheikh, an old man with grey-white beard and dark eyebrows, small eyes and arched nose, wore the loose garment of the Bedawyn, falling mid way between knees and ankles. His long pointed sleeves almost touched the ground. On all sides were the upland pastures. In the distance were the black tents of the tribe.

Reuel gave the sign, and two men dragged forward a ram by the horns. He told Moses to lay his hand on the head of the sacrifice.

Moses, who had lived for some years amongst the Midianites, was tanned as dark as they, and wore the same white garment, did as he was commanded. Reuel took the ram by the horn with his left hand; bestrode it with his knees, and pulled

from his girdle his long knife. Tilting the head back, he made a long, deep slash in the stretched skin. He handed the knife to Jethro, his son, who stepped forward to receive it, then, as the blood poured from the wound, he dashed the stream and spray of it against the altar. As the ram ceased his struggles and fell forward on his knees, Reuel directed the blood to the base of the altar. As soon as the ram moved no more, he straightened his back and with his blood-stained hand touched Moses on the ear, to make him attentive to the commands of the Lord God; on the hand, that he might be ready to do the will of God; and on the foot which was to walk in the way appointed.

Reuel took the fat of the insides, and the fat of the tail, the kidneys and the caul of the liver, and the right thigh of the ram, and added from a basket some unleavened bread. These he held on outstretched arms, bowed, straightened himself, bowed again, ceremoniously waving them before the altar. He turned and gave the sacrifice to Moses, then kindled the fire from a torch that Jethro handed. When the flames were crackling, he signed to Moses to place the offering on the altar. "This shall be the portion of the Lord God, for at this feast we share with him the flesh of the offering."

In like manner a second ram was sacrificed. The fire burned till all was consumed. The remainder

was portioned amongst the tribe, that in the evening they might seethe and eat it with unleavened bread as was commanded.

When only glowing ashes remained, Reuel questioned Moses whether it were still his wish to approach the tent, lift the curtain and look within.

“It is my firm wish.”

“Then come with me; yet fear always the Lord God when drawing near to him.”

At a distance from the tent, Reuel took off his shoes; kneeled and touched the ground with his forehead. Moses did likewise, and, as he did so, there came to mind memories of the elaborate and costly ritual of Egyptian temples.

In Egypt—a multitude of gods whose mystical significance was lost in the observance; here, a single god, rudely worshipped in fear.

The sheikh lifted the curtain. Within the tent on a tripod stood a chest of olive wood.

Moses, who had seen the great temples, the obelisks, and the vast carvings of the gods, the pyramids and the avenues of sphinxes, stared in silence at this box.

“It is well you question not idly,” said Reuel. “In Egypt are a multitude of false idols. But the Lord God has no image.”

“And within the ark?”

" Within the ark is the Power of Yahweh, invisible and unknown: the breath which is God."

" What are his attributes ? "

Reuel lifted his hands, stained with the blood of the sacrifice, in a gesture mingled of fear and adoration. " He breathes anger, breathes jealousy. . . . Jealous, lest we fall away to other gods, he demands sacrifice of blood. Our first born are his, and are redeemed by blood of sacrifice. He is in the movement of the wind, in the running of water, in the lightning and thunder of the storm. He stands forth in all that is alive. Steadfast, unchanging. He does not cease. He is the mighty God. His wrath is destruction. By submission and sacrifice his anger is averted."

As Moses heard the words of the Sheikh, the gods of Egypt dwindled, and his mind filled with stories told on winter evenings when the tents were pitched in the valleys; men have told, how in early days the tribes came from Chaldea, how they sojourned in Syria, and how Abraham, the ancestor of both Midianites and of his own people, pushed south to Egypt, how Isaac was asked as sacrifice. He recalled the story of Jacob, who had stolen the birthright, and had fled from Beersheba towards Haran, and dreamed of a ladder going from earth to heaven and the angels of God ascending and descending, of how the God, Yahweh, requiring integrity of

heart and innocency of hands, stood above the ladder in the heavens, and had said to Jacob: "I am the Lord God of Abraham, the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south; and in thee and thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

In these stories Yahweh had appeared as a milder deity than the god of whom Reuel spoke. Had the old man grown fanatical in his priest's office? His god seemed almost a demon of anger and jealousy, clothed in fear, rather than in the love of men. In the common heart, god's attributes are wider, and though he be feared, he is also a friend and supporter. Though arid rocks and the red, bare mountains show his anger; yet are the valleys green and friendly.

His own people had once shared this worship, which stands opposed to the religions of Egypt, as the Israelites stand opposed to the Egyptians.

To Reuel he said: "Often have you spoken of the commandments of God. Tell me the law, that I may learn it for myself."

These words pleased the Sheikh. "My son, you do well to ask. When your son was born to my daughter Zipporah, you called his name Gershom, which means a stranger, because you were a

stranger among us. But now I would have you be one of our tribe; and when your second son is born, which is yet in the womb, I would have you call him Eliezer, which means: the true God has helped me. You have asked to hear the laws of the Lord God. . . . Listen and learn."

With a slow emphasis he recited: "Take heed to make no covenant with the inhabitants of other lands; but thou shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and cut down their Asherim. Thou shalt worship no other god, for the Lord whose name is Jealous is a jealous God.

"Thou shalt make no molten gods.

"The feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep. Seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread.

"All that openeth the womb is mine, the firstling of ox and sheep. The firstling of an ass, thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if you wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break its neck. All the first-born of thy sons shalt thou redeem.

"Six days shalt thou work, but on the seventh thou shalt rest."

Reuel sank into deep meditation, as though communing with the god whose law he uttered; and Moses, respecting the long silences of the priest, asked no question.

A vision appeared in the mind of Moses, of a pair of scales; in one pan are the wealth and magnifi-

cence of Egypt, the power of the Pharaohs, and the beauty and infinite variety of the gods; in the other is the hard simplicity of a tribe of shepherds. The two pans pull one against another, and the glory of Egypt does not outweigh the crude piety of Reuel.

Offering, sacrifice, and redemption are the breath of all religions: in Egypt as in Midian; yet in Egypt the breath comes short. The Pharaoh in his earthly splendour has usurped the unseen power.

Moses regarded the empty box within the tent, yet his mind beheld the gigantic granite statues of Rameses, planted against the outer pylon of the temple of Ptah. They gaze solemn and intent across the groves of dark palms. The lofty enclosing walls, decorated with scenes from the victories of the Pharaoh, hide from the assembled crowd the great fore-court of the temple. Clad in their short cotton tunics the people are gathered in the streets and in the palm-groves; they have climbed on to the ramparts of the fortress on the eastern wall and are watching, row behind row, to see the approach of Pharaoh and his retinue, when he comes from Memphis to worship at the temple.

First, two lines of priests enter in double file, cross the fore-court, pass under the second pylon, against which are yet greater statues of the Pharaoh; they cross the inner hall . . . and open the outer, then the inner doors of the sanctuary. Two other

files of priests follow. After passing the first gateway, these range themselves in front of the temple dedicated to the gods, Amun, Mut and Khons.

Pharaoh and his retinue approach. Twelve chariots precede him; the crowd are driven back, to right and left; the drivers leap down, retainers run forward, and, taking the horses by the bridle, lead them aside. From the thirteenth chariot descends the ancient Rameses.

From under his white, bushy eyebrows, over his hooked nose, eagle-like eyes watch all that is happening. At seventy he is still thin and alert; his white hair stands out in tufts on either side of his head under the heavy crown of the united kingdoms.

The priests intone in front of the temple.

"Great and blessed is Rameses
In the house of Amun.
Great and blessed is Rameses
In the house of Mut.
Great and blessed is Rameses
In the house of Khons."

The doors open, disclosing the figures of the gods. Amun is of human form and wears on his head a plain, deep circlet, from which rise two parallel plumes, tail feathers of a hawk. In his hand he holds a scourge. His consort is Mut, mother of life; she wears the double crown. Their son Khons,

god of the moon, wears on his head a crescent and a disk. The chant changes:

“These are all the gods
Amun, Mut and Khons.
These are all the gods
Amun, Mut and Khons.”

Before the figures the people make perfunctory obeisance. The priests in the outer court gather together and move into the inner hall. The chief priest advances; in front of the sanctuary he performs a ceremonial dance and opens the inner door, revealing the golden figure of Ptah. The priests prostrate themselves; offering a small image of the goddess of Truth. Sacrifices are placed on the altar; then the celebrants divide, leaving space for the Pharaoh.

Rameses stands erect and alone before the god and utters in a clear monotone: “Thou shalt give me health, long existence and a prolonged reign; endurance to my every member, sight to my eyes, hearing to my ears, pleasure to my heart daily. And thou shalt give me to eat till I am satisfied, and thou shalt give me to drink till I am drunk. And thou shalt establish my issue as kings for ever. And thou shalt grant me contentment every day, and thou shalt hear my voice. And thou shalt give me high and plenteous Niles in order to supply thy divine offerings and the offerings of all the gods and goddesses

of the South and of the North; in order to preserve alive the divine bulls; in order to preserve alive the people of all thy lands, their cattle and their groves which thy hand has made."

He ceases; a murmur goes up from the multitude, and immediately the priests begin again to chant. . . .

The voice of Reuel, solemn and commanding, broke the silence, dispelling this vision of the past. "And the Lord has ordained laws. Three times a year shall all the males of the people appear before him. And thou shalt not slaughter with leavened bread the blood of his sacrifice, neither shall there remain all night unto the morning the sacrifice of the feast of unleavened bread. The first fruits of all thy flocks shalt thou bring unto the tent of Yahweh, thy god. And of this also take heed. be not thou like to the ungodly and gluttonous: Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk, lest the milk in the udders of all thy flocks be dried."

Reuel waited for Moses to speak, but Moses was silent, for again he thought of the balanced scales: on the one was the culture, the greatness, the splendour of the Egypt that he knew, the greatness of the Pharaohs, and the beauty and variety of the gods; on the other the piety of the Midianite shepherds, which grew as a living thing from the bread and meat of their sustenance.

Reuel let fall the flap of the tent, and together the two men turned back towards the camp.

II

In the valleys and creeping up the hillsides was a flush of green. The spring rains had fallen and low-growing herbs were pushing from between crevices in the rock. The upper portions of the mountains were bare, on these the sunlight poured steeply, scorching the chance-fallen seeds. Along one of the valleys Moses led his flock of goats and sheep. Slowly the flock followed the downward slope, grazing as it went. In the trough of the valley was a grove of low-grown camel-thorn and acacia bushes. These clustered about a spring and a pool. Under their shade, he rested while his flocks pastured.

The wilderness had become familiar. He knew the scent, the taste and touch of all plants on which sheep feed, could feel the presence of water, though it were deep underground, and a breeze coming from a distant valley would tell him whether there was pasturage there. The sky was clear and deep; the hills, with their ridged or rounded crests, were white and red in their nakedness. Each day was like the last: the sun rose, climbed its steep path to the Zenith, declined and set in a silence broken

and emphasised by such slight sounds as the bursting of a ripe seed-pod, the scuttling of a lizard across the stones, or the distant bleating of the flock.

Moses had grown accustomed to solitude; was content that day should follow day and be lost. As the breath of the wilderness became more significant, he felt his own life deepen. As shepherd he must find water and food for Reuel's flocks, and at night guard them from wild beasts. His body was an unconscious servant. The barren rocks under the blaze of the sun, the dark earth under the stars alike ministered to his strength.

As day followed day, he found his life to be divided into two halves. . . . An exile in a strange land, he watched time pass in seeming peacefulness, yet in his heart and mind stirred memories, breaking his contemplation. The present had come out of the past, yet seemed so different as to be unconnected. Here all was peace; the monotony of a shepherd's life, his wife and child not far distant, guarded by friendly tribesmen. If this were all, life were simplicity; but, like a swarm of locusts, blackening his sky, were thoughts, wafted from Egypt. They would not pass, but hovered nigh him, never out of reach; often importunate, they disturbed his solitude.

In the shade of the acacia bushes, while he sat waiting through the hours of sunlight, his thoughts were with his wife and child. He saw again his

tent amongst the Midianites, where he lived with Zipporah, daughter of Reuel.

It is of black fabric, seamed with narrow lengths of his wife's rude worsted weaving; the yarn of her own spinning, mingled of wool and goat's hair. Its pent roof is supported by stakes, four rows of them in parallel lines, and at the flanges is strained strongly to the ground by cords of worsted-twist. At the sides are black curtains of the same fabric pinned at the selvedges with wooden skewers, and along one line of the inner stakes a curtain separates the sleeping room from the rest. On the floor are sacks of corn, leathern skins, sticky with clotted dates from Amalek, and lumps of rock-salt from the desert of Sin, for the flavouring of food. Full-bellied water-skins are laid on sprays of broom on the ground.

He saw again the well where his wife and her sisters would have drawn water for their flocks, and rude Bedawyn had driven them away. With hand on sword he had bidden the shepherds be gone, and they, taking him for an Egyptian, had fled. He had helped the maidens draw water; in gratitude they had asked him to go back with them to their father's tent.

He saw the tribe crossing the wilderness, the tent of Yahweh carried in front on the back of an ass. The tribesmen follow with their flocks. In the midst

of the caravan are women and children on donkeys. From the saddles and bridles hang long tassels of red and blue cloth and little pieces of bronze which glitter in the sunlight.

Then in a few moments he was far away. . . . Before him stretches the dark delta of the Nile where the walls of the city of On rose from the flat, rich lands. He is back in the university as a student, and sits amongst a crowd of others on the floor of the lecture hall. The lecturer is rolling up his scroll of papyrus. The young men crowd to the doorways; one or two remain writing on their slates. Amongst these, he himself lingers at the far back of the hall.

Amenthes had come down from the lecture pulpit, put away his scroll in a cupboard, taken out another and unrolled it. Amenthes imagined himself to be alone. The rays of the setting sun, slanting through a window, slowly moved, until the teacher, who had at first been in shadow, was now in direct light. His hair was grey at the temples; his face long and cadaverous. Becoming aware of the light that enveloped him, he raised his head, and looked up musingly with his queer slanting eyes. He spoke in a low but distinctly audible tone. "O living Aton, Beginning of life, when thou settest in the western heavens the world is in darkness, like the dead. How excellent are they designs,

O Lord of Eternity ! Thou art in my heart. . . .
By thee all men live. When thou hast risen, they
live; when thou settest, they die."

The word Aton had stabbed like a dagger, for by that word Amenches had shown himself to be the adherent of a persecuted creed. Moses' first impulse had been to go unnoticed; but a moment later, he had come forward and stood before the heretic. The difficulty of speech, which in moments of excitement came upon him, held him inarticulate. His teacher had looked at him searchingly, then as though lost in his own musings, had glanced again at the papyrus in his hands.

Amenches did not fear him. He had no cause to fear, for Moses would never have betrayed him! At last Moses found words and said: "Tell me of Aton, and about the Pharaoh whose name no man will pronounce."

As Amenches answered, a slight smile played at the corners of his lips. "Tell me first of Amun-Re. What have the priests taught you ? "

"They teach conflicting tales. But amongst thos who come to the lecture halls, there are, as you know, many who doubt."

"Ah, but the main story ! Let us have that. . . . What was there in the beginning of all time ? " He had used intentionally the formula of the Priest's Catechism.

Moses accepted the half-mocking mood of this examination, and recited, as though repeating a lesson: "First of all living things was Re. He rose as a naked babe from a lotus flower, and floated on the primal ocean, Nun."

"And what else?"

Though he remembered clearly the fables of Egypt, Moses gazed mutely at the tiled floor of the lecture room. They had been stories for the mind only. At last he answered: "Re crept from an egg that lay on an island in the midst of the holy lake."

Again the gentle, ironical voice: "And what else?"

"He was self-begotten on himself. With his own sword he pierced his shield, and sprang new-born from the wound."

"Yes, and what else?"

"He was the father of Show and Tefrut, born, so they say, of spittle. These gave birth to Keb and Nut; from these sprang Osiris, Seth, Isis and Nephthys; from this cycle of nine come all living things."

"Yes."

"There are many stories which I can repeat."

"And the gods of your own race?"

"I have heard names; yet the Egyptians do not often speak to me of my own people."

"The names of God," Amenthes had said, "are as numerous as the fish in the Nile. Since the beginning of time men have invented names for the gods; to each, these names have conveyed something different, though akin."

"But of Aton?" he urged.

"Aton is the one god, whose symbol is the disk in the heavens, the Spirit of Life."

"The one God?"

"The one and only, immanent in all things. He is the creator; mankind are his children, yet through men he shall reach his perfection."

"Is he the same for all?"

"As the sun shines, so Aton."

"And the other gods?" he had questioned.
"What of them?"

"In them Truth is divided," said Amenthes. "The Pharaoh Akhnaton would have replaced the many forms by the one truth. He would have raised man from the surrounding material of the world, into the material of the universal, from which the world is made."

"Tell me more of Akhnaton. How is it you are chosen for this faith?"

A natural calling. History has advanced that far in me."

This answer had puzzled him, and Amenthes, seeing that he was not understood, had proceeded

in his aloof voice: "Whatever things may have happened in the past or may happen in the present, only those are of significance which a man's inner intelligence recognizes as belonging to himself."

Years ago these words had been uttered, yet they still dwell in his memory.

In late twilight he had left the lecture-hall. It had been suffocatingly hot throughout the day—a relief to be riding through the dark suburbs of the city. Uncertain which direction he should follow, he had allowed his ass to take what way it would.

Marshes were interspersed with cultivated land; water-birds were calling to one another . . . gleams of black water. The moon, a little from the full, rose over the escarpment of the eastern desert.

His ass turned along a grassy track, which in a little distance led to the Nile. The river was a wide band of darkness. On the far side were the lights of a village, and beyond the plain, on the rising ridge of the desert, the polished sides of the pyramids reflected the moonlight, like burnished metal.

The track led to a hut. Beside it, floating amongst the reeds was a boat. He had called into the entrance, and in answer a man of his own people had come out clad in rags.

He left his ass at the hut, and the boatman took him across the river. During the long passage

they were silent, separated by the gulf between their conditions. He watched with interest the features of his companion. Why should men of the same race be so far apart? Why should he alone, amongst the Israelites, be rich and privileged? He yearned to speak with the man and ask questions, but some ambiguous shame held him back.

From the jetty a path led him through a village of silent huts. It continued through fields, along dykes. . . . Through marshland it went winding westward towards the desert and the pyramids. He climbed the escarpment, and in a few steps had left the fertile plain. Before him, stretching into the diffuse nimbus of the moon's pale light, was bare rock.

What cold, geometric mountains were these sepulchres! How small he seemed before the affirmation of such might. In stature a pygmy, as in mind. The Egypt that had heaped these stones had been great indeed. From the shapeless earth, the blocks had been cut and set one upon another. The final mass, square and unshakeable, was testimony to all time that man had been.

The moonlight, though soft, had seemed deathly: no moving life, no least plant on the arid rock. How different from these upland hills of Midian, where now sounded the bleating of his flocks! No life beyond the river and its valley. Only the

sullen and rectangular hills imposed on the empty immaculateness of the desert.

Relief had come when he had turned from those monuments of man's past greatness to the thought of Akhnaton. Did Amenches favour him unduly? A mild scholar, he might worship such a god and such a Pharaoh. . . . Akhnaton, believing in mildness in an age when mildness was not, had lost the Syrian provinces. . . . A lover of pleasure, a theoriser, no soldier, hardly a man, an invalid, subject to fits, a dreamer of dreams, a degenerate. . . . Had he reigned another ten years, Egypt would have perished.

Moses had skirted the base of the Cheops Pyramid and passed between that and the Pyramid of Kefren. The desert was before him with low, distant hills, like black shadows in the moonlight.

Suddenly he had come upon the sphinx, half-bedded in the sand. He had often seen her before, and many others both at Thebes and Memphis, but never had she seemed to him so strange, so grand. Like a living thing, she crouched there in the sands, which sifted from the desert over her rock-hewn body. Such, he thought, was the greatness of the old Egypt. Year by year the sands were sifting over the past. The Creature, with eyes wide open, was like a gigantic flower of early spring-time, a blossom without leaves, unfolding out of the rock;

direct from the earth, she awaited the impregnating touch of the wind. She seemed a beast, alert for a leap. . . . No. One that is already sated . . . contented as a lion, whose mouth is already wetted with blood. The eyes were a man's and dreamed on the past, untroubled by events. They had seen all things, they gazed afar, even into the future. She was a divinity, knowing neither fear nor hope. She dreamed . . . and in that inward dream were both the desert and the stars. The deeds of all past Pharaohs were her thoughts; she guarded their secrets.

Suddenly he had seemed to be in danger from the Sphinx, as though she threatened something waiting to be born within him. He, too, that night had been an idle dreamer.

A great idol, he thinks, a power beyond the control of man, the enemy of God.

A mysterious sound, half ghostly, half musical filled the valley and was echoed by the hills. A slipping of sand on the mountain side, the grains, fretting one upon another, make a swelling, loud music. As though a voice spoke, he listened, but the words were unintelligible. The purpose of their sound seemed clearer than their meaning.

The sun had dipped into the haze, which lay along the western horizon. The pulsing disk of light was

cut by the outline of the hills, sank slowly and was hidden. Moses, pushing aside the bushes, came out into the open. He stood, entranced by the cool calm of evening, which was even deeper than the stillness of the day. He listened, then in clear, low tones prayed: "May I follow truth every moment, and look through the eyes of certainty."

Bats were flying overhead, and the cry of a hyena came from the distance. He walked towards his flocks, calling them to gather about him for the night.

III

In the autumn Moses returned to the camp of the Midianites. One evening he was sitting in the fore-part of his tent when Reuel and Jethro came to talk with their kinsman. Within, Zipporah prepared the evening meal.

"Why is your mind troubled?" asked Jethro. "You have found peace with our tribe after your wandering."

Moses touched his beard, so signifying that his life and destiny were in his thought. "Yet for all your kindness, I am still a stranger. My mind dwells with my kinsmen in Egypt."

"Tell us of them. You have always been silent."

Reuel, watching him, said: "Have you heard the report? The ancient Pharaoh is dead. Men-
ephtah rules in his stead."

"No, I had not heard," said Moses quickly, and would have said more, had not Zipporah come out from the tent to fetch the child that he might be laid to sleep within.

"It is true," Reuel continued. "I had the report from some wandering men of the desert, and they from the Egyptians at Maghareh."

"This news moves me; for thinking of my own people I have been ill at ease. Now, perhaps, I should return to them."

"Your home is here," said Jethro. "You came as a stranger, but now your tent is next to that of my father."

"You have given much. Here I have found peace for my body and safety. Yet often my blood is restless for my own kinsfolk."

Reuel, watching from under his grey brows asked: "Would you leave us?"

"I have thought of it."

"Truly a man's life were a vain thing apart from his tribe," said the old sheikh, "out of his tribe he has come, in his tribe is his past. His life is that of his nation."

Moses called to his wife to bring soured ewe's milk, that they might drink. She poured it from

the goatskin into bowls of olive wood. The men drank and wiped their beards.

“ You must bear with me if my spirit is sometimes heavy,” Moses said. I think of my father and mother, who were old and sick, of my sister, who spoke of revolt and was beaten with whips. My people’s suffering is a thorn in my flesh. They suffer not only servitude but the evil of false gods; they have turned aside after images; their servitude and their corruption have become one.”

“ For that doubtless they are punished,” said Reuel.

“ Have they not been punished enough? Shall they never be delivered? ” Moses asked with a note of anger. Then controlled to his accustomed gentleness: “ Sometimes, alone with my flocks, I have dreamed of such a deliverance. . . . Not for always shall they be slaves; I have dreamed that they shall become a great nation, a wise and understanding people. . . . I think that God has set this thought in my heart. I have waited, have listened for his word.”

“ He speaks not often,” said Jethro.

“ Nay, my son,” said Reuel, “ he speaks, and clearly. I, myself, have heard him. In the mountain, even Horeb, there is sometimes a great thunder; clouds gather and out of the darkness a voice has spoken. In my youth I have heard. . . . ”

"And what then did you see?"

"I have seen what I have seen," said the old man.

"The appearance of things is not always their truth. Among men the name is given from outward appearance; with God the name is the inward truth."

"Then tell me," said Moses, "what is a man's fate before God, and how shall he know it?"

Reuel paused; he stroked his beard and closed his eyes, then, opening them again, and looking at Moses, he said: "Consider a seed. For us it is a seed, but before God it is a plant with roots and leaves, and with flowers which themselves bear seeds. With man, so it is as with the plant; our fate is our appearance before God."

Moses pondered—not only of his own fate, but of the Children of Israel. . . . A great nation, a wise and understanding people!

IV

After a winter spent amongst the tents of Midian, Moses again led his flocks towards the high pastures. Travelling westward, each day the peaks of Sinai seemed nearer and greater. Sometimes he met other shepherds with their flocks, yet for the most part he was solitary. At night he slept in the open, with no covering but his cloak; inured to hardship,

his limbs felt neither heat nor cold unduly. Often he lay sleepless, watching the stars. In the hush of the night both earth and sky seemed to speak with unmistakable accents. His heart was open to the desert and the silence. As the plants grow from the seed, each by the law of its kind, as the sheep crop the plants and live, as man eats of flesh and bread and lives, so God, invisible and unknown, is the judge and the master of life, in plant, beast and man.

One day he met with a shepherd, a rude Bedawy, and for a while they herded their flocks together. In the evening the shepherd prostrated himself to pray. He uttered aloud his simple prayer.

“Oh God, choose whom you will to be your servant. Where are you? Make yourself known, that I may be your servant, and sew your shoes, and comb your head; that I may wash your clothes and kill your lice and bring milk to you. Oh, most worshipful God, may I kiss your hand and rub your foot, O God to whom all my goats are a sacrifice.”

These words appeared to Moses a foolishness and idolatry. With sternness he asked: “To whom is this prayer addressed?”

The shepherd was abashed; he was afraid that his prayer might have seemed ridiculous, and answered timidly: “To the One who created us; by whom this earth and sky were brought to sight.”

With impatience Moses looked on the shepherd, and seeing his diffidence and his ignorance, thought: how far is such a man from understanding? He said, "If you know that God is a judge, how is it right to address him with this doting familiarity? God is not in need of such service. Do you think you are speaking to a man, or to your uncle? God does not need such familiar service. Hand and foot are well enough in relation to men, but in relation to God they are pollution."

At this rebuke from a man far wiser than himself, the shepherd bent his head and looked on the ground. He plucked at his sleeve and said: "I have spoken stupidly." After awhile he arose and went his way.

Alone in the wilderness, Moses continued to think of the shepherd's prayer and of his own rebuke. He remembered how the man had looked on the ground and would not meet his eye. As he thought of the shepherd's shame, he himself was ashamed. It seemed as if the voice of God were speaking to his heart, reproaching him, saying: "With thy words thou hast parted my servant from me. Is thy strength to unite or separate? I would not be parted from my children, not even from this shepherd. I have given to every man a proper way of acting, just as I have given to every man a different form. What this man said was worthy of praise in him, though in thee it might

deserve blame. His honey is thy poison. Dost thou not know that I am above purity and impurity? I am not worshipped for my profit, but that I may do kindness to my servants. I look not at the words, I judge by the spirit."

The more he thought, the more uneasy Moses became. The voice continued: "I look at the heart to see whether it is lowly. Remember that the heart is the substance and that speech is the accident. I desire not praise but tingling blood. Light a fire of love in thy heart. Thought and expression will be burnt away. They that speak discreetly are one sort, they whose hearts burn are another."

Overcome with remorse, Moses ran to overtake the shepherd. He saw him in the distance and called to him; and when he had come up with him said hurriedly: "I have come for pardon; God has reproached me. Speak as your heart bids. What I thought was a blasphemy I see was true worship; in me was the fault."

The shepherd stood still, looking on the ground. Then, without raising his eyes, said: "Your rebuke has changed me. . . . I have made a long journey . . . I was ignorant, thinking of God, as of myself. He shines like the sun, and I am a shadow. God's blessing be on you, for your words have done this for me."

Moses was the more ashamed, yet joy was stronger than shame, carrying it as a father his child, he said: "Till our ways part, let us keep our sheep together," and in his heart he mused: "Even in my fault God is justified, what for me was a sin of pride, he has turned to understanding. Because he is God he is justified, though we men are guilty."

v

In the spring season of rains, seeds germinated in the clefts of the rock; small leaves and flowers unfolded, tinging the brown uplands with a flush of green. Following the verdure, Moses led his flocks ever higher on the flanks of the mountains. The central core of Sinai seemed to rise into the sky, as he himself climbed upward. On these pastures he met no other shepherds. At night the stars travelled far above the peaks, and, in the day, the sun, on its wide arc, looked down on him alone.

The air was dry and pure. Because the ranges descended into the deep blue of the distant plains, because the bright sunlight devoured earth's solidity, so that he seemed at times to be floating, imprisoned in crystal brilliance, such solitude appeared too beautiful for heart of man to hold. Sounds became different from those heard in the valleys where men lived. The falling of a stone was like a bell; it

tinkled along the decline till it rested. Its faint reverberations lived for long after in his mind, and floated beside him in the silence. In the purity of his isolation his sight was changed. The hills were at one moment of the earth, and at another of the air. They both were and were not, their being was the breath of an eternal power. When he stood gazing at some tiny flower that pushed among the rocks, he saw its minute gracefulness swell to infinite grandeur. Not a plant sprung from a faint dampness in a crevice, but the reflection of stars, a fragment of some timeless quality.

He seemed to float beyond the reach of time. Yet deep within himself was an entranced restlessness. Some task was laid on him, and, thinking of the Israelites in bondage, he heard the rocks ring hard, like iron under his tread.

Nigh to the summit of the granite mountain, between two rocks stood a thorn tree, spreading tangled branches, thick-set with long white thorns. Wondering at its lonely altitude, grown so high above all others of its kind, he looks, and lo ! it is ablaze with light as if on fire. The flames that leap from twig to twig burn also within the deepest core of the plant; and, as he gazes, between that inner and that outer light, his own self seems to stand. The branches neither crackle nor smoke. In the midst of flame, the bush is not burned. His heart beats

faster, and his blood struggles too strong and swollen for his veins. A voice calls him by name. Without stirring lips or breath his being answers: "Here am I."

"Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

He removes his shoes and kneels. He sees only the bush in flame; all else is forgotten.

"I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their task-masters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them out of that land unto a good land and a large, into a land flowing with milk and honey. And now the cry of Israel has come to me."

There is silence on the mountain, and Moses, trembling at the words which must follow, hears: "Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayst bring forth my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

He lifts his arm to cover his face, and cries out against the flame and against the voice: "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the Children of Israel out of Egypt?"

As he kneels with his face hidden in his arm the voice answers: "I will be with thee."

"What token shall I have?"

"Thou shalt bring the people out of Egypt and they shall serve God on this mountain."

Again Moses pleads: "When I come to them and say, the God of your fathers sent me to you; and they shall ask me: What is his name? what shall I say to them?" He puts down his arm from before his eyes, and sees the flame still burning.

He hears the words: "I AM THAT I AM."

Fire spreads from the bush and covers the ground and all the place about him where he stands. "Thus shalt thou say unto the Children of Israel, I AM hath sent me to you; and thou shalt say, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob hath sent me. And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel unto the king of Egypt, and thou shalt say to him, The Lord, the God of the Hebrews hath met with us; and now let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to The Lord our God. . . ." Thus the voice commands him, and answering his doubt, it says again: "The king of Egypt will not give thee leave to go, no, not by a mighty hand."

Again Moses covers his face and waits with closed eyes, for the thought that he should do this thing is heavy and daunts his confidence. And while he hides the light from his eyes, his faltering courage speaks: "They will not believe me nor hearken unto my voice, for they will say, The Lord God is not with thee."

Darkness is before him. He rises, grasping his staff. With a wild courage he looks on the thorn tree, which still burns. Held by that wonder, he cannot move. The voice answers: "What is that in thy hand?"

"A rod."

"Cast it on the ground."

He does so. In the light of the burning bush he sees a serpent and . . . trembles with fear. . . . "Put forth thy hand and grasp it by the tail." And when he does so, it is a rod as before. He places his hand over the quick beating of his heart, and when he draws it out from under his robe, the blood is withdrawn; it looks leprous and white. He thrusts it again into his bosom and feels the blood course through it; it grows whole as his other flesh. His blood waits on the word of God, as his servant. God speaks through the tingling and burning of his blood "I AM."

Yet his mind still clamours: "Oh Lord, I am not eloquent; I am of slow speech and of a slow tongue."

God answers him: "Who made man's mouth? who maketh dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now, therefore, go and I will be thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt speak."

His thought answers unwillingly and with ambiguous phrase: "Send I pray thee, by the hand of whom thou wilt send. . . . Do thy pleasure. . . ."

He is overcome with weariness, light has gone from the bush; he is alone on the hillside. He feels that he has angered God, and in his mind casts about for help that he might get from others; then like an echo of the earlier voice comes the message: "Is there not Aaron, thy brother? He will meet thee and be glad. Thou shalt put the words into his mouth, and I will teach thee what ye shall say and do."

That same evening, pondering his task, Moses leads his flocks down towards the valleys. As the sun sinks the full moon rises in the east, and Moses, looking from one to the other thinks: To-day the two halves of my life have seemed of equal value. I fled from Egypt that I might come to Midian; I return that I may bring my people to this place, even to where I now stand. Yahweh has commanded; He has told me of the land of His promise.

CHAPTER III

SINAI

I

THE desert table-land forms a vast crescent, ending a range of perpendicular cliffs, the northern limit to the mountains of Sinai. To the south the heights are rugged and lofty, bare granite, porphyry and sandstone, shading from yellow to dark purple. Blues and greens tinge the valleys: hardy plants grow sparsely on those barren soils.

An eagle is floating high in the upper air. The wind and the strong lift of his wings carry him over the central core of the mountains, where heights rise steeply from deep valleys. He looks down on domed, bare crests, and on peaks rent by ravines and fissures. His sight reaches to the deserts on the north; to the east and west, he catches the gleam of distant seas. Sloping his wings he glides to lower level, then hovers. Valleys lead westward to the green oases of Rephidim, where the crests of the palm-trees look like minute rosettes on a carpet of moss. Immediately beneath is an upland

plain, a wide opening in the midst of a rough sea of hills.

There is unusual movement in the depth beneath, for the plain is filled with a multitude of men. They are tiny and remote, yet they darken the floor of that wide space. The eagle gazes with incurious eyes upon the immense wedge-shaped block of granite, which forms, fronting the plain, the central, grandest peak. Far beneath, on the eastern flank, he sees two of those remote and tiny men. Sometimes lost to view behind boulders, they ascend slowly, as though intent on some fixed purpose. He watches their slow progress, then slanting his wings, he lets the wind carry him to other, emptier valleys where there is no stir of life, save perhaps, of a gazelle or rock-coney.

II

There is no path. Those two must needs scramble over broken talus, and find a way between blocks fallen from the cliffs above; on either side tower precipices. They climb in silence, the elder leads; the other treads in his footprints.

Since herding the flocks of Reuel, Moses has aged; yet his body is lean, very sinewy and strong. His dark reddish hair falls in a thick mass on to his shoulders. His beard is streaked with grey; the lines on his face are of a more resolute stamp.

His eyes seem to burn more hungrily. In his hand is a thick staff, with which he strikes the rocks as he climbs.

Joshua is in early manhood. His nose is hooked, his eyes are slightly protruding. Hair and beard, not so long as his leader's, are of a darker tinge. At his girdle is a sword, on his back bow and quiver. Both men wear the Bedawyn garment and the woollen cloak.

All day they have climbed, and in the evening halted where a cave was formed by boulders, wedged in their downward fall against each other. Here was cool air and protection from the sun. "We will rest and eat," said Moses, "and when I am refreshed a little I will go further."

Joshua took from under his cloak a small water-skin, a packet of clotted dates and some bread. They sat and ate in silence. As Joshua handed the food and waited on his leader, his features were set as though carved out of wood, expressing no thought, only a slow fierceness and imperturbable fidelity.

After he had eaten Moses glanced back along the track. Again for a long while he brooded; at last he said: "Word has come to me from God that I must go forward alone. Wait for me here till I return."

"May I not come with you?"

"No. Wait here."

"For how long?"

"I know not."

"The people may grow impatient."

"What of them? Are they not content?"

There was irritation in his tone.

"They are content."

"What then?"

"They need their leader."

"Have they not Aaron and Hur and my sister Miriam?"

"Ay . . . but do not forget how at Marah they murmured because the water was bitter. . . . At Rephidim they were ready to rebel because there was no water for them and their beasts. They are unused to dangers, are strained by the long march and the battle."

"Then let them rest."

"They need your presence." Joshua spoke with an unmoved insistence. "You have told them that the Lord God has delivered them, and they accepted your words, yet have their eyes seen that it was you who made the waters sweet by throwing into it the branches of trees, that it was you who brought water from the rock when you and the elders digged about it in the desert of Sin. . . ."

He would have said more, but Moses said sternly: "By the power of God alone am I their leader. In their blindness they see only me and my deeds, where they should see the power that guides me."

They are lacking. . . . And you, too, I think, doubt also. . . ."

Joshua was silent, and Moses continued: "I would be plain with you. . . . I have led the people to this mountain that they may also be changed: A nation dedicated to God. At this same place where I received the command to break their servitude, I would have them make a covenant with the Eternal. I would have them know and see, face to face, the glory of Yahweh. For unless they breathe the breath of the I AM, they perish in their sins. . . . Look not so sullenly on the ground, Joshua, but tell me: Will you not believe?"

With dogged submission, he says: "I believe in my master."

The fire in the eyes of Moses sank, smouldered and died. "That is not enough. Without God I were nothing." Then, touching his hand, "See me as a man. How could I have prevailed alone? How could I have saved them from the sea and the horsemen of Pharaoh? Could I have led them through the wilderness where there was no water? Could Israel, an undisciplined rabble, have prevailed against the ordered ranks of the Amalekites? These things were done by the power of God. . . . While the battle was raging in the valley, I sat watching on the hill-top. Israel saw my hands as I raised them for their support.

Not by their own power but God's, did they conquer. When I grew tired, and let my hands fall, then were they discomfited."

"We in the field of battle fought very hard that day."

"Strength was given you."

"I am a plain man," said Joshua. "I will do what is commanded, I am your servant, and will not fail."

For some moments, Moses looked at his averted face, then looking away over the wild and uninhabited hills, remained in thought, till Joshua said: "I would go with you up the mountain."

"That may not be unless you can believe as I believe. I go alone, since no other can come with me."

"Am I forbidden?"

"I go alone."

Moses stood up, grasping his staff. "My friend, take it not ill that I refuse you this. . . . Dearly would I wish to have you with me, were it permitted. God will have tasks for you, for which I am not worthy, but now wait here till I return." He turned abruptly, and, setting out at once, began to climb along a narrow gully, which lead between high domes of granite.

Joshua called after him: "Stay not too long, return quickly to the people."

But Moses did not answer.

III

After many hours he gained the crest of the precipice which fronted the plain. The skyward mass of the mountain was yet behind him, yet from a high vantage he could look down on the tribes of Israel. The only sound which broke the stillness was a faint continuous murmur rising from the camped multitude. At the base of the sheer decline were the foothills, which the people might not pass.

As he looked down, he could see the camp divisioned into tribes as he had ordered. Each group of black tents was like a village, and before each a standard pole with banner. He counted them: to the east Judah, Issachar and Zebulun; to the south Reuben, Simeon and Dan; Levi in the midſt. On the west were Ephraim and Manasseh, sons of Joseph, and the tribe of Benjamin; northward were Asher, Gad and Naphtali. A column of smoke was rising from the fire which had burnt ever since they set out from Egypt; carried by the Levites in the van it had been by day a whirling smoke, preceding them, and by night a flame and sparks in the wind.

From a distance they looked an orderly array. Moses forgot the difficulties of the march; he saw them there as a nation, saw them as knit together by victory and by blood spilt in battle. They

seemed no larger than ants on the far plain; yet with pleasure he watched their goings to and fro, the interthreading movements. More than five thousand come out of Egypt, even to this mountain . . . a river that shall flow through the world.

On the march from Elim southward, the long straggling line had been harassed by raids of the Amalekites. Small groups that lagged or strayed had been cut off by the wild tribesmen. Ill-armed for battle and unaccustomed, they had found it hard to withstand the swift attacks.

In the throat of the valley, the Amalekites were drawn up in battle array to defend the waters of the oases of Rephidim. If Israel were beaten, they would die of thirst in the wilderness; if victorious, would find water for themselves and their flocks. He had chosen Joshua as their chief in battle, a commander picked from the ranks, untried as were the men themselves.

It was for Israel to move forward. Slowly they advanced. There had come a flight of arrows, and then with a great shouting, the spearmen of Amalek had charged. Under the impact the Israelites line had bent back. His people had been all entangled with their enemies. Some were struggling in flight, others stood their ground. There was confusion, the line seemed breaking. On his hill-top, stationed where those who were fighting could see him, he had lifted his hands,

that, seeing him, they might renew their courage. Joshua rallied his men. The line held. They must have victory or they die. Still a confusion, still uncertainty! His hands became heavy with their weight and sank at his sides.

The enemy had climbed over the rocks and were attacking on the flanks. He had said: "Hold up my hands." Then Aaron had taken a big stone and set it under him, that he could rest, and on each side Aaron and Hur had held up his hands. Israel had rallied, and so the battle had raged till sunset, when all the tribes had raised one great shout and overborne their enemies, scattered them and slain them. Very few that night had escaped to the hills.

With stones stained with the blood of battle he had built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovahnissi. The Lord is my Banner, and had sworn by the blood that had soaked into the ground that Israel should war with Amalek from generation to generation.

The enemy's camp, rich stuffs, vessels of bronze and silver and gold were their spoils; they had stripped the bodies of the dead, taking shields and weapons. The oases of Rephidim were now for their leisure: the plantations of palms, the groves of sidr trees, with their acrid sweet fruit . . . blue, misty bushes of tarfa thorn and white-flowering broom, over the slopes of the hills. Here they rested from the desert and ate and drank their fill.

IV

On the mountain where God had spoken, solitude welcomes his soul. Past months have claimed too much of him, and left him tired. He seeks the inner stillness, yet, ere his thought can rest, he lives again scenes of past danger.

Midway from Egypt, Aaron had met with him; together they returned towards Egypt. They halted for the night in the valley of Elim. Their asses grazed on the scant bushes while they sat in the fading light talking together. Aaron said: "I will send messengers and call the elders to a meeting; if there is any man to whom they will come it is to me. To me they look for what protection is possible, for I am of account amongst them. My task has been hard, for the people below look up to me to ease their burdens, and the masters above visit their wrath on me if the work is not accomplished." There were shrewd lines on the face of Moses' brother . . . practical, not lacking in power. "I," the voice continued, "have saved them; often I have quenched their rebellion lest they should be destroyed."

"And now?"

"Now their discontent is so great that their fate seems not in the power of any man."

"Their blood clamours to throw off their bondage?"

"Truly, I think it does."

When the blood burns, God has spoken. They shall cast off the yoke. Against his power the might of Egypt shall not prevail."

Aaron looked doubtful. "You have told me," he said, "of a bush burning with fire on the mountain. Although it burnt it was not consumed, and a voice spoke saying: 'I am that I am.' What meant the voice?"

How he had answered his brother's question he had now forgotten, but present thoughts came pressing, like sheep in a flock one upon another: I have seen the world move as I move; as in a mirror. What I have seen is no longer the world, but has become myself. It is different from all that I have seen or experienced. Other than my blood, yet surely in my blood power has grown, and come through me, and spoken. . . . I breathed, and the air that I took was of the world; in my blood it mingled with the life. Of that mingling was I made. The blood is the life, and I was made anew by God speaking in my blood. When I saw the bush burn with God, my understanding looked inward; yet was my will turned outward according to the command that bade me go and deliver the people. . . . The God, that is God, is this power in the blood. I say they shall be a special people dedicated to the God in their blood.

They shall be children of God, and a light among the nations of the world. They shall be separate, reverencing the purity of their blood. . . .

He was impatient that Aaron had yet questioned: "How is it that God is manifest in the blood?"

"Know you not by your own feeling? Or is this thing known only to those who dwell in solitude?"

By this speech Aaron had been offended and said stiffly: "It is known to all priests who make sacrifice that blood is a special fluid."

Moses pondered in his solitude in the mountains. The upland pastures of Midian were again before him: the clear sky at morning and the clear sky at night. Before he had set eyes on Midian, he had known the mystery cults of Egypt, and had heard the priests say "As above, so below."—The world and ourselves are a sky and a lake; the light in the one is the light in the other. The world and the soul are two eyes. The life that moves them is hidden. In the blood is the soul carried, a gift that shall be returned to the giver. Blood is offered for atonement. When it flows on the altar, the soul escapes and returns to the giver of life.

He had been at pains to make clear his thought to his brother; had spoken of a people united by blood, pure, separate, exclusive.

Aaron had said: "You know them not as they are. They have forgotten the God of their fathers. Many worship in the temples of Amon. . . ."

"They shall be reunited under the God of their fathers."

Dubiously Aaron had looked at him, yet he had agreed to call a meeting of the elders.

They were gathered from Zoan, from Rameses, from On, from Pi-Bast, from Memphis and from all the land. Some were young men, some grey beards, all come at the command of Aaron to hear what hope there might be in their adversity. Here he had seen again his sister Miriam. She was grown to an old woman, wild and dishevelled. That she should have been for him as an image of his soul, now seemed strange. A prophetess, men called her, frenzied in bitterness against the Egyptians. She had hailed him with acclamation, but her words had not moved him. He had withdrawn into himself.

Aaron spoke to the people with swift and ready words. He reminded them how he had counselled caution, advising them to bear the ills they had, lest worse should come. Had not his life been their servant, his authority their salvation? As a man holds a restive horse he had held them and tamed them. He spoke of Miriam, who had

prophesied a deliverer, and of his brother, an exile in Midian. Moses was now returned bearing a message from the ancient God of their fathers. They were to listen, and if persuaded, then they, Aaron and Moses, would be their leaders, and demand their release from Pharaoh.

The people had been hushed, surprised that Aaron, who was always cautious, should speak boldly. They murmured, questioning each other: Who was this Moses, this exile from Midian? Some said he was an Egyptian, and some, a Hebrew, brought up in the court of Pharaoh.

The eyes of all had been upon him. He had looked on their questioning, upturned faces. He had held up his staff and remembered how on Sinai he had cast it on the ground and it had become a serpent. He told of the burning bush, and of a voice speaking of deliverance, and of a land where their fathers had long ago worshipped, a good land, their own land, full of flocks and sweetened with honey. He thrust his hand under his cloak, and when he pulled it out it was white and stricken. "See," he said, "how the blood is withdrawn. Thus do you leprosely perish in Egypt: and now behold . . .!" He thrust back his hand into his bosom. "Behold the blood runs into it, and my flesh is sound once more. . . . So shall you also be made whole."

v

The sun sank behind the hills; darkness, like the shadow of a wing spread across the sky. The camps on the plain were no longer visible, only the fires showed like red sparks.

Moses climbed higher up the steep, bare flank of Sinai.

Again he rested. About him silence, no sign of other life. He thought of Pharaoh. He and Pharaoh are like weights on either scale of a balance. No longer does he see Midian weighed against the riches and the power of Egypt, the desert tribe against the mighty empire, but he, himself, alone, against Pharaoh, alone. On one side the magnificent master of the Nile, and on the other a man trembling on uncertain feet. How should the balance swing even? A miracle! It did!

With Aaron he had stood before Pharaoh to demand the release of the Children of Israel. Menephtah had come north from Thebes with all his retinue. He sat in the throne of his father, the great Rameses, and gave audience to those who came to him for justice. He had aged, a fat man and bald. In talk with one of his courtiers, he scarcely noticed that they stood before him. Aaron, nervous and trembling a little, began to speak; his own hand had been on his shoulder to steady him.

“ We stand here, great Pharaoh, as representatives of the people of Israel. And thus saith the Lord God of Israel unto thee, Pharaoh, Let my people go that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.”

Menephtah lifted his eyebrows and smiled. “ Indeed I know not the Lord you speak of; certainly I will not let you go from the tasks which are set you to perform.”

Aaron said: “ The God of the Hebrews has met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice unto the Lord our God.”

Pharaoh had frowned and asked their names.

Then it was he had watched closely to see whether Pharaoh remembered the son of Thermuthis, but Menephtah gave no sign, but said sharply: “ Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, loose the people from their works? Get you back to your burdens. Begone! ” And he turned again to the noble with whom he was conversing.

They went from the presence with heavy hearts. And soon bitterness came, when they learnt that heavier burdens were to be laid on the people. The taskmasters received commands to give no straw for the bricks, as in the past; yet would the tale not be diminished.

The people had been scattered over the land to gather stubble for straw. The women and children spent their days carrying it to the men in the pits.

The taskmasters were urgent, saying: "Fulfil your work, as when there was straw." Then, because they could not, the officers of the Israelites were beaten.

Because they were beaten, they had gone themselves to cry for justice to Pharaoh, and said: "Wherefore dealest thou thus with thy servants? There is no straw given us, yet the taskmasters say: Make bricks, and we are beaten, and the fault is not ours."

Pharaoh had frowned. "Ye are idle, ye are idle."

Then with bitterness they had come to Moses and complained that he had put a sword in the hands of their enemies to destroy them. They reproached him, even in the name of the God that he had evoked.

In that heavy day he feared that Aaron, too, might fail in his resolve. Yet was his brother staunch; though cautiously he would go forward by hidden rather than by open paths. He spoke of enchantments: he would make wonders before the king, that Pharaoh might believe in a wonder and perhaps let the people go. For himself, he had prayed to God.

Once again in the silence, God's message lives and is articulate: A voice sounds as it had sounded in Egypt. "I am Yahweh: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac and unto Jacob, as The Mighty One; but by my name Yahweh I was not known to them. And I have established my covenant

with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojournings. And moreover I have heard the groaning of the Children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant. Wherefore say unto the Children of Israel, I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: and I will take you to me for a people, and I will be your God: and ye shall know that I am Yahweh your God. And I will bring you unto the land concerning which I lifted up my hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob; and I will give it to you for a heritage: I am Yahweh."

Resolute, with regained confidence, he had gone out to the people, but they would not listen to him for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage. Again he had prayed.

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The power stirs in his heart: he thinks of the massed multitude, stationed in their twelve tribes in the valley. By the help of God he has brought them thus far.

VI

Between Pharaoh and himself lie the intricate ways of love and hatred. Each in his separate path is a

worshipper of life. He worships in light, and Pharaoh in darkness. Yet Pharaoh is a man as he is; because he had contended with him, he does not hate him.

Pharaoh bore the burden of arrogance; were it not for that burden, his humility might also have said: "I am," and in that saying would have found God. But Pharaoh had hardened his heart.

Was not Pharaoh the balance that had made his fate? God had said: "Be," and both Pharaoh and he had been born. They were colours that appeared different. Listening to the silence, deepening like a sea till the bottom can no more be plumbed, he felt that he and Pharaoh were at peace in the stillness where God abode. Their strife was of a day. The quiet of God knew nothing of strife. As men chaffer over the sale of asses, so he and Pharaoh over the freedom of Israel. . . . The night was quiet before God, and the day also, yet sometimes the day seemed so busy as to forget the presence of the Most High. . . . The loftiest star speaks as humbly as the least stone. . . . Pharaoh had been so busy that he had forgotten that, in the quiet, he too was a man; he had thought that he could prevent God's law.

The falling of a stone stirred by his foot roused Moses from his contemplation. As he had stirred his foot, so had God stirred, and Pharaoh had fallen into the abyss.

Aaron thought only of the plagues and famines. Never in the memory of man had there been years of such affliction. Aaron was always talking of how the water of the Nile had run red like blood, of how the fishes and all beasts in it had died. When the redness of the river had abated, frogs in thousands had come from the marshes, into the streets and into the houses, so that no place was not filled with them. They increased and multiplied; doors could not be shut against them, household vessels were full of them, the water infested, food uneatable. They dropt from the ceilings upon the beds, and if a man put his bare foot on the ground in the night, he crushed beneath it the soft, yet bony body of a frog.

Aaron, eager for magic, contended with soothsayers of Egypt to produce marvels. He claimed the frogs as his making; the soothsayers contested his claim; they wrangled one against another.

Pharaoh said that if Aaron could take away the frogs from him and from his people, then he would let the Israelites go to make sacrifice to their God.

Aaron had looked at him askance, doubting his magic, but he, Moses, had prayed that the scourge might be removed. Was not Yahweh the lord of life and death? Surely in answer to his prayer the frogs began to die. People gathered them in heaps, and the whole land stank. Yet, when they

claimed of Pharaoh his promise, Pharaoh hardened his heart against his word. He said the frogs had died because of their great numbers. He would not let the people go.

There were swarms of lice and flies, and a murrain on the cattle. Because the cattle died, the herdsmen were without work. The wealth of Egypt dwindled.

Men's thoughts were inflamed, disordered at the smell of death and plague; many there were that prophesised destruction and the end of all things.

His prayers gave him strength to be the leader of the nation; and Aaron, probing in magic, found greater wonders than the soothsayers could rival. Miriam was a wild woman, dishevelled, openly rejoicing in the ills that fell on Egypt. For her the flies and the murrain plagued not the Hebrews or the fields of Goshen, but only the Egyptians. . . . And yet had Pharaoh hardened his heart.

Like a red sunset when the sky is angry flushed these memories. Men outgrew themselves in hope of good and in working evil. Aaron by his magic was exalted among the people. Pharaoh dare not lay hands on him, and Moses himself, in the midst of that red whirlwind of contending angers and fears, had thrown ashes into the air that the Egyptians might be stricken with sickness. He had called on the power of God, and had stood before Pharaoh and had prophesied a great destruction. When

the storm came, how he had trembled ! Yahweh thundered in the heavens. The vines were broken down by hail, the cattle and flocks frenzied by the hot thunderbolts.

Pharaoh sent for him and said: "I have sinned, entreat your God, for there have been enough of mighty thunderstorms and hail; I will let you go."

Yet when the hail passed, he went back on his word, finding that not all the crops had been destroyed.

Swarms of locusts came with the east wind from the desert; they devoured what the hail had left. Their wings darkened the daylight. Pharaoh called him again, and said: "Go serve your God, but leave your flocks behind." He had answered: "Our cattle shall go with us, that they may be the sacrifice and burnt-offering."

Then was Pharaoh wrath: "Get thee from me. Take heed to thyself; see my face no more; for on the day thou seest my face, thou shalt surely die."

"Thou hast spoken well," he answered. "I will see thy face no more."

When the sun rose, Moses was still seated on his stone, at his back were the unexplored heights

of Sinai, and at his feet the mountain ledges whence he had climbed. He lifted his eyes to look at the disk of the sun, throbbing as it rose above the jagged outline of the hills. Even thus had his heart burnt with love for the people.

From all parts of Egypt they had clustered, like bees about to swarm. The taskmasters no longer controlled them, only the soldiers of Pharaoh did they fear.

At Pa-Rameses, they had waited, while the plagues of God struck the Egyptians.

He ordered that the feast of Mazzoth should be kept, as in Midian, in the month of Abib. By the observance of this feast, the worshippers of Yahweh would be separated from those who followed other gods. Each household had taken a lamb, a first born of the flock, and killed it. The master of each house let the blood run into a basin, and dipped a bunch of hyssop therein, and struck the lintel and the two side posts with the blood, and no man went out until the morning. The blood on the door posts was to be a sign of the life within the house, and a sign also of the sacrifice offered in atonement for their souls. They roasted and ate the flesh of the lamb that same night with unleavened bread and with herbs, as was the custom.

That night, at the time of the feast of Mazzoth, at the full moon, the spirit of God had passed over the land, and because of the blood on the door

posts the Hebrews had been spared, but among the Egyptians, in every house where the first-born of the flock had not been offered, God took for himself the first-born son of the house.

There had gone up a great cry throughout all Egypt, and Pharaoh rose in the night, and all his servants and all the Egyptians, for there was no house where there was not one dead. Even in the night, Pharaoh had called for him, and had said: "Get you forth from amongst my people, you and the Children of Israel. Go and serve your god. Take also your flocks and your herds." And the people of Egypt were urgent that they should go quickly, for they were afraid.

That night they had set out from Pa-Rameses and had journeyed towards Succoth.

He had not dared go eastward by the road which led past Azarek and the frontier fortresses; too many soldiers there; but had led them south by the way that he knew.

As the day dawned, he had looked on them crowding the narrow lanes. A great multitude, they and their cattle. Dust hung above them in cloud. He and Aaron had passed to and fro cheering them, urging their departure, for he feared, even then, that Pharaoh might change his mind. The men looked to their beasts and the women to their children . . . a great talking and

shouting and the braying of asses, the lowing of kine and the bleating of sheep. . . .

A day and a night they had camped at Succoth in Goshen to gather all stragglers that had not yet joined them. Tents had been set up, which he had ordered to be made. In an open space they camped, with all their goods set about them. . . . On one side date-palms and cultivated land; on the other open plains towards the east. That night his heart had wavered, seeing them an unruly mob, escaped slaves, having no law. They had laden themselves with household stuff, beds, cooking vessels, great sacks of clothes, all they could lay hands on. What knew they of the desert, or the long march?

The slow start at dawn, the slow straggling march. In small groups they wandered; many separated from the rest; tired or faint-hearted, some had been lost or had perhaps returned.

At Etiam on the edge of the wilderness, where that night they camped, he ordered that a fire should be lit, as a rallying point, a shower of sparks in the night and a column of smoke by day. As in Midian, when they trekked in the desert, this fire should be dedicated to the Lord God.

On the third night at Pi-hahiroth, between the fort of Migdol and the sea, he gazed anxiously across the water. The moon was full, the tide

should be low, and a way possible; a spit of land, laid bare, between the Red Sea and the Sea of Reeds, where they might go over.

Even while they camped, messengers from the rear-guard came running, breathless and terrified, saying that the war chariots of the Egyptians were approaching from the westward. They were come to slay them, or drive them back.

The camp was in a hubbub. He had gone down to the water's edge, and, wading in, had found it was too deep to cross, though the tide was ebbing. The people cried to him: "What will you do? Where will you lead us?" He could not answer them, but walked up and down on the sand by the edge of the sea, knowing not what to do.

He ordered the fire, which was in the van, to be taken to the rear, and that many bushes of brush-wood be piled on it, that perhaps its smoke might hide them a little from the Egyptians. And then he continued his pacing by the water's edge.

In despair he had thought: The Egyptians will slay us in their reckless anger.

The people had thronged about him and cried out: "Because there are no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore have you done this? It would have been better to have left us alone, for it is better to serve the Egyptians than to die."

He bade them hold their peace, saying that God would help them.

The waters were sinking, but not fast enough. By bending down with his ear to the earth, he could hear the thudding of horse hoofs. The water would never sink in time. . . . There was no hope of resistance. Women and children, terrified, clinging to the men. . . . They would be slaughtered.

Pacing the sands in his extremity, he prayed. . . . He felt a faint breeze on his face. . . . Holding his hand up, he had felt a stirring of the air. A wind, from the desert ! It grew in strength, it was a mighty rushing, and, before it, the ebbing waters were driven back and banked up into a wave. His pity for the people was burnt clear in a great hope. "Fear not," he had cried, "see the salvation of the Lord !"

The wind still gathered strength and the waters receded. A ridge was bare, as it had been when he crossed alone, a spit of sand between two seas. Lifting his rod, he bade the people march forward in confidence.

In their haste, much household cumbrance was lost, but the people, and their flocks and herds passed over. The Egyptians in hot pursuit followed over the bed of the sea, and though the wheels of their chariots stuck in the soft sand, they were so

many and their horses so strong, that they still came on.

The wind veered. It had blown strongly from the east, it now blew from the west. The water which had been forced back was released and driven forward in a great wave. It fell on the Egyptians, sweeping them and their chariots far into the sea where they were drowned.

Israel, halted on the far bank, watched the power of Yahweh. They feared the Lord; and knew Moses for his servant.

Miriam, her grey hair flying, danced on the shore; many women with her. His own heart, grown great in triumph, had made a song for the minstrels to sing.

“Sing unto the Lord for he hath triumphed gloriously;
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

My strength and song is Yahweh;
He is to me for salvation.
He is my God and I will praise him;
My father’s God and I will exalt him.”

Then answered Miriam and the women:

“Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously;
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.”

Then the minstrels sang:

“The Lord is a man of war;
Yahweh is his name.

Pharaoh's chariots and his host he hath cast into the sea
And his chosen captains are sunk in the sea.
The depths have covered them;
They sank to the bottom as a stone."

Then answered Miriam and the women:

"Sing unto the Lord for he hath triumphed gloriously;
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

The men answered the women with deep voices:

"Thy right hand, O Lord, is glorious in power;
Thy right hand dashed in pieces the enemy.
In the greatness of thy might,
Thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee;
Thy wrath consumed them as stubble."

"With the blast of thy nostrils the waters were piled up,
The floods stood up as in an heap;
The enemy said: I will pursue, overtake, divide the spoil;
My lust shall be satisfied upon them;
I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them.
Thou didst blow with thy wind; the sea covered them;
They sank like lead in the mighty waters."

And again Miriam and her women answered:

"Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously;
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

Moses in the stillness, in the dawn, amongst the mountains, felt his pride mingled with humility, as the wind that serves God with its strength and then lies down in meekness.

VIII

Throughout the day in the scorching rays of the sun, Moses remained almost motionless, like a piece of rock. His mouth was dry, yet he felt neither thirst nor hunger. His mind continued its journey through a past as rugged as the desert.

Once more the long line of the Israelites straggles over the trackless way, over the heat-stricken, white rock of the desert. Now he is in the van, pointing the way, now in the rear guard, cheering stragglers. . . . The Amalekites attack. He hears the cries of anguish, and the fierce shouts of on-slaught.

For three days they marched without water. . . . Women and children drop by the way, many of their beasts die, and have to be abandoned. Voices are raised against him. In the suffering of that drought, he, too, doubts. Around them the world dances in a mirage; nothing on earth remains as it had seemed; the heavens themselves tremble. Had Yahweh delivered them from the Egyptians that they should feel such anguish of spirit and body?

At Marah the people grow frantic. The water in the spring is so bitter, none can drink. They spit the water out of their mouths, and their eyes reproach him.

He had learned in Midian to cut down the sidr

trees. . . . bitter leaves to make the bitter water sweet. They had not believed in the power of the leaves, but, tasting, they had drunk, and drunk their fill, they and their beasts. They had looked on the changing of the water as a marvel. He bade them give thanks to Yahweh.

Southward they march to Elim. By open wells and brooklets at last they rest.

Southward again, always southward, with the sea on their right and the mountains on their left. A land of no streams and few plants, yet, by digging with staves in the sea-sand, they uncover a current of fresh water from the uplands.

They had come to Rephidim, and met Amalek in battle, then threaded the winding valleys ever higher into the mountains, till at last they had come to Sinai. . . .

The past bewildered Moses like a mirage, hanging inverted in the sky. The world is a vanity, and a disuasion from thought. Even his wife and children, and life in Midian seem ghostly, beckoning, faint and distant. Back into his childhood his memories were whirled in thick, vague clusters. . . . Theris muthis and her women. . . . paintings on the wall. . . . the toys he played with, clay puppets with gilded faces. . . . The gods of Egypt, a host of shadows. . . . myth interlocking with myth.

The past is a painted curtain separating him from God.

With eyes, set and blank, with hands rigidly gripping his knees, he looks into himself. Memory fades like breath clearing from a mirror; the present grows clear and sharp. The stillness, the tranquillity speaks to him and says: "I am thy tongue and thy eye; I am thy senses, and I am thy good pleasure and thy wrath. By ME thou hearest, and by ME thou seest. Thou art the possessor of MY perceptions. Through the bewilderment of the past thou hast become what thou art; but now thou art become Thyself, and I am thine. Sometimes I say to thee: 'It is thou,' sometimes, 'It is I.' And when no voice is heard, even then I AM, and fill the emptiness of every moment, and support thy terror and restore thy spirit to dare again."

IX

Moses has not noticed the passing of night or of day. As a calf at the altar is sacrificed and the blood poured on the ground, his own life seemed lost. He remained in a trance, as though part of the rock that had lived always on the mountain side.

When, after many days, his limbs move once more and his senses wake, heavy clouds have

gathered over Sinai. Behind dark masses in the west, the sun sets.

Between the black bosoms of cloud over the mountain, there comes a flash of lightning; the thunder is a mighty voice among the peaks. Moses leaps to his feet. He is giddy at his sudden awaking. He staggers, supporting himself on his staff; he is faint from his long fast.

Again flashes of light. Thunder is breaking amongst the crags, it makes an incessant rumbling. Forks of fire, strike the rocks near him, and from the ground, upstanding domes of blue fire meet the lightning from the sky. The thunder is as the bursting asunder of the core of life. It rends jagged curtains; it is more terrible than lightning. Big drops of rain are falling. Against them, Moses raises his arm to shade his eyes.

More clouds, like black waves, break over the crest of Sinai; as they meet and are shattered, rivers of fire stream, spreading to meet the rock in vast deltas. A sudden down-rush of torrential rain . . . the thunder is a continuous splitting and rending.

Water sluices over his limbs, streams swirl about his ankles; his hair and beard are heavy and soaked. With eyes blinded, ears deafened, he falls on his knees and bends his head towards the ground.

Astonishment, which for a moment had pierced his heart, is itself overwhelmed by the terrible

thunderings and tremblings of the mountain. His life is God's. His posture is not of supplication, but submission.

Waiting the will of God, he thinks of the Israelites gathered in the valley. . . . Water enough now for them and their flocks. . . . They, who had been the slaves of Pharaoh, were his children. . . . Corrupt, without scruple, borrowing where they meant not to return, stiff-necked, idolatrous, perverse . . . the steel sword on the anvil of adversity. . . . They, too, as he now, in the midst of the storm, must kneel in submission.

Moses rises and stands with the rock firm under his feet. Rain streams over his body, the lightning is continuous, a blaze of coloured fire. Deafened by the thunder, blinded, he shields his eyes with his arm.

There is silence. He no longer hears the storm, no longer feels the rain. . . . There was a pool in Pharaoh's garden, where in the evening he had sometimes sat. Though deep, how clear! Far down a fish slowly rose into view out of the darkness. So now, like that fish out of the dark, towards the sunlight, there rises an inner calm out of that silence, guarded by the crashing of the storm. In that inner stillness is a voiceless message: "I am Yahweh, the Lord thy God; thou shalt have no other gods before me."

God was the breathing of life, and not confined to any created form: "Thou shalt not make to thee any graven image, thou shalt not bow down to it nor worship it."

Life in the inner stillness shall not be violated: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."

Man should have pause from the things of earth, and make a calm for the inner life: "Remember that thou keep holy the sabbath day."

The bond of blood was between parents and children: "Honour thy father and thy mother."

Mankind was a blood-brotherhood: "Thou shalt do no murder."

The blood is the spirit, and shall be kept pure from one generation to another: "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Man must learn to live in equity and peace: "Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness. Thou shalt not covet."

The storm passed; the sky was washed and clear; the sides of the mountain were running with little brooks. Moses began to trace upon two pieces of stone the commandments that he will give to the tribes of Israel.

CHAPTER IV

THE GOLDEN CALF

I

WHILE the people were gathered about their tents, their glances strayed in doubt to the column of smoke rising from the station of the Levites. Since they had left Egypt, the fire had guided many stragglers through the wilderness. "Where is Moses?" they asked one another, "Why does he stay so long in the mountain?"

Said Shaphet to his neighbour Jephun: "He has led us to this desolate plateau, where is little water and scant herbage, and now has gone no man knows where."

Jephun answered: "When Joshua came back, he told Aaron that Moses had gone high into the mountain to speak with Yahweh. When the great storm came there was no sign of him under the clouds."

Dathan asked scornfully: "Who is Yahweh, that he should be set above the other Gods?"

Kabaz, tending the fire, heaping dry sticks, hearing the question, paused, looked, frowning, at the questioner, and said austereley: " May your youth excuse your folly; you question idly."

" Who then ? " said Dathan. " Can you tell me, old grey beard ? "

Kabaz. " The God of our fathers."

Dathan. " Not my father or of yours."

Abiram. (*Touching Dathan on the arm*): " Do not bandy words with the old fool. Before Moses came from Midian, our gods lived amicably together; Yahweh is too jealous for our liking."

Kabaz. " Take back your words, lest they lead to evil."

Abiram laughs, but Shaphet, interposing, says grumblyingly: " Whatever his purpose, it is bad for our flocks, which sicken on this upland pasture."

Dathan. " Bad for us also. We are scorched in the day, and frozen at night."

Abiram. " Better return to Rephidim. Leave Moses to his mountain."

Kabaz. " You would not speak thus if Joshua or any of the captains were to hear you."

Dathan. " Ho, ho, Joshua has had his belly full of mountain air."

Abiram. " When he came back he looked as hungry as any wolf, and as bad tempered."

Jephun. "Perhaps Moses has died on the mountain."

Shaphet. "Indeed he may be dead."

Abiram. "Dead or alive, let us return to Rephidim."

Kabaz. "Well for you that Joshua does not hear you."

Abiram. "Joshua has gone to bury Moses' bones."

Kabaz. "Young man, have you no gratitude? Moses saved you from the sea and the horsemen of Pharaoh, and do you think he will now fail us?"

Dathan. (*Speaking to the others and ignoring Kabaz.*) "Old men will believe anything, even in a god no one has seen. For my part I have more trust in Ptah, whose image we all knew, and in his sacred bulls."

Kabaz is about to answer angrily but checks himself. He goes away muttering. The others, watching his departure, group closer together.

II

A deputation of elders stood before Aaron's tent. Dathan and Abiram had flattered Shaphet to be their spokesman. "To you, Aaron, son of Amram, we come to speak of the sickness among

the cattle; they grow weak and thin on the poor pasture. We seek your help, knowing you our friend, a man not rash but valuing life as it is. You have worshipped in the temples, and know the influence of each divinity on the beasts. Save our flocks that dwindle and die. Call on a god that will save our cattle."

Aaron, who had heard rumours of discontent, did not speak for a while, for he feared mutiny. He knew that on the life of the cattle, depended the life of the nation. He had been opposed to camping in so high a region, but had been overruled by Moses.

It was more than thirty days since Moses had gone away into the mountain. Men said he might have died there, and, indeed, he might be dead. At length he asked: "Are you of one mind?"

"All who matter are of one mind," shouted Dathan.

"Know you not the Lord God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with whom, even now, Moses has gone up to have speech."

"We have never seen him nor his likeness," answered Shaphet, "and as for Moses, he has served his turn; we shall see him no more. Nor do we want his god, who is only a breath, no man can see. He has not saved our cattle from sickness. Make us a real god to go before us, one who will save the cattle."

"It is not for me, a man, to make gods. . . ." Aaron began, but they broke in upon him:

"You are more to us than Moses. All the years of our servitude you have been with us; you know us better than he. He is a stranger. He has been missing more than thirty days, we know not what has become of him."

"He will return," said Aaron.

"No. . . . No man could survive the storm."

Aaron pondered. He asked: "Do all the people think he is dead?"

"We are sure of it. The fire descended, the earth shook. Lead us back into the valleys. Make us a god to go before us."

Aaron called his four sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazer and Ithamar, and spoke with them apart. Then to the elders he said: "Go back, and quiet the murmurings in the camp. Come again to-morrow and I will speak further of what you desire. . . . Quiet the people; let there be no mutiny. Be prudent in all things."

III

That evening there came to Aaron's tent Korah, the magician, who, in Egypt, had cast spells with him against the magicians of Pharaoh. He lifted the curtain: for a moment was seen against the

darkness, then stepped forward into the rush-light. A tall man and fat, he stood within the tent; and as Aaron looked at his great bulk, he felt aversion and a shadow of fear.

Korah did not speak, but with his watery, blue eyes looked ambiguously at Aaron. He extended one hand, held it at arm's length, then pressed the palm to his forehead, giving the sign that he would speak of things hidden from the uninitiate.

Aaron rose to give the countersign, touched his beard, and, with his left hand, formed the open triangle between second and third finger.

Korah laughed. "So my friend, you are ready to receive me. Now that Moses does not return, it is time for us to talk together. . . . You know what the people say? Ah! You need not tell me . . . ! In the meanwhile, the cattle sicken, their bellies growing fat while their flanks grow thin."

With such lazy movements as though he might tie his sandal, he made a second sign, drew his sword, pricked his thigh, and laid the blade on the ground. "We will take counsel what is to be done: act, and act quickly."

Aaron did not move nor speak.

"Moses is lost. Well, he has served his turn. In him the power which has brought us thus far." Korah opened his hands, smiled and closed them again. "In these mountains are alien spirits; we

have done nothing to appease them. . . . You should hear the stories in the camp. . . . Spirits from the underworld peep from behind rocks, groan on dark nights, shake the sides of the tents and crawl into the mouths of the cattle while they crop the scant grass. . . . The people call on Moses and on Yahweh, but they are frightened."

"Who knows what has happened to Moses?" Aaron broke silence.

Korah shrugged his shoulders. "Meanwhile the flocks are dwindling." He wore no longer his slightly jocose manner. His blue eyes appeared swollen with sudden concentration.

Aaron, standing his ground asked: "What do you want?"

"There must be sacrifice to the demon spirits of the place."

"You know that already the people have been making sacrifices."

Korah nodded. "Breath has been given, and blood spilt, but that is not enough."

"What then?"

Aaron, who till now had seemed to resist the entrance of the magician, motioned him to be seated. His eyes lit with shrewd rivalry, for in Egypt these two had been competitors in occult dealing.

Korah seated himself, and Aaron waited till he said: "Beside the spilling of blood and burning

of fat there must be a bond, a secret sympathy, between the victim and the people. The under-divinities must be satisfied. The people must give not only flesh, but will and imagination; and since their wills are weak, we must make flow from them the life that can mingle with the life of the victim. It must be made again, tangible, not to be doubted, for being men, what they see and feel they will believe."

"What is your meaning? Speak clearly."

"After the victim has been slain, we must build an image for them to worship."

"What image? An image of their God?"

"God or gods, what matter?" exclaimed Korah with fierce emphasis. "We know that gods are but signs of things beyond man's knowledge." He inclined heavily towards Aaron. "Gods must have forms if they are to be believed in; they must be seen, touched, valued by weight in metal; how else can they have power over the senses?"

"Moses," Aaron began, "Moses would not——"

"Moses is dead. But we, who are alive, must travel farther. The cattle die, and the tribes, leaderless amongst the mountains, seek for the gods they have lost. What is Yahweh to them? What is Yahweh to them? They have known his name a month or two. In time of hardship, they go back to the gods of Egypt." Korah paused, and,

leaning back, smiled sourly. In a colder, milder tone he said: "I would deal fairly with you, Aaron. . . . Some still believe that Moses lives; they look to you. . . . Persuade them of his death. . . . Join your powers with mine."

"Moses may yet live."

Korah made a slight gesture of negation. "Shall we be together, or will you oppose me?"

Aaron shifted uneasily. "What would you have?"

"Take a bull-calf, a firstling, slay it as sin-offering. On it, the sickness of the living; and in its death, the sickness shall die. Let the people drink the blood as it falls; in them it shall be renewed. Make an image of the sacrifice, that in glittering metal it shall show its regained strength."

"And if I will not do this?"

"Then I will do it."

"Wait a little longer. Moses may yet return."

"We have waited long enough."

"Wait till Joshua returns."

"I have spoken with Dathan and Abiram."

"What say they?"

"They say they will not wait."

Aaron, who had risen, took a few paces to the side of the tent and turned back again. He looked at Korah, who remained seated. "Tell me what you would have?"

“As blood is the colour of worship, so is gold the colour of sacrifice: the metal of the heart. Make an image of gold. . . . Unless they pay for their gods, they will not long believe in them. Tell them to break their gold earrings from their ears. . . . remember the craft of Aziru, and make an image of a golden calf to be their god.”

Aaron was silent, and Korah, knowing his man, took silence for consent. In genial tone, such as endeared him with the folk: “Come, sit down, look not so troubled. Have you forgotten your wisdom? Do you not know that in each man’s heart is a desire for an image; if he have not a god to put there, he will put in its place some lesser thing, a woman, perchance, or a child.”

“Moses said,” Aaron answered, biting his pale lips, “that the god Yahweh is the breath of life, and will suffer no image.”

Korah leaned back at his ease, and smiling said: “If Moses said that, and if he is the prophet of such a God, he does not know men’s hearts. Each man, if he is to taste life and happiness, carries an image in his heart. Each man, as his life stirs, would find an image that he may love it, and as his spirit grows would worship an image. There is no love and no worship save the love and worship of images.” He held out his hand towards Aaron and smiled. “You, who have turned your rod

into a serpent, need not be reminded of the power of images. Come, be cheerful, my friend. Make a golden calf, and make the people pay for it. Let them see it and touch it, and this gloomy plain will ring with their shouts and rejoicings. A golden calf will be more to them than a god that no man can see. Do this and they will call you blessed.

“Say to them,” he continued after a pause, “that the Golden Calf is the god of Israel, and has delivered them from Egypt. End this wearisome waiting, and when the Golden Calf has been set up, make peace-offering, and order rejoicings. Together we will lead the tribes away from these mountains. . . . Come, why do you not speak?”

Aaron said: “I think, indeed, Moses must be lost.”

“No doubt, he dared too greatly; the powers of the underworld enfold him.”

Aaron made the sign of the sacred letter. “I mourn,” he said.

“But you will act, as we have agreed,” said Korah, and nodded.

IV

When Moses had finished writing the law on two pieces of stone, he let his hands fall at his sides and remained immobile. For many days no food had passed his lips, only the water of the brooks.

As he sat there, life, as pure and clear as the air after the storm, seemed to flow from him, and be one with the calm of Sinai; and in the calm a voiceless message came: "To thee the Law is revealed; as servant of life, thou commandest the power which may provide thee with all good and protect thee from evil. To thee the name of God.

"As all water is the same, yet each drop separate, so the name of God: the drop which contains the ocean. As man draws breath, so is the name contained in him; as he breathes out, so does the name emanate from the source.

"As woman to man, so the separate soul to unity; and as to a woman, so to thy soul shalt thou say: 'Thy maker is thy husband.' The two must be made before the one can be manifest: active and passive, neither can be shown without the other. Life, the bridge between, vibrates like a sunbeam, it is both one and many.

"Know that the Name is nigh to thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayst do it. I have set before thee, this day, life and good, and death and evil. Be thou what thou art, and thou shalt be, I AM. Be thou the pitcher going to the well, and the waters shall be in thyself.

"Under thy commanding the children of Israel shall be the children of I AM. They shall be liberated from bondage.

“ Yet because they are men and forgetful, set an empty tent without the camp; let that be to them a sign of man’s life. In its emptiness I dwell, and those who enter, breathe the eternal breath.

“ In the tent, set also an ark, which no man shall open, for though the Name be known, yet shall the Name be hidden.

“ As the bush burned with fire, so for my children all things shall burn with meaning, remaining what they appear, yet glorified.

“ When Jacob wrestled with me, and would not let me go till I blessed him, I touched him on the thigh as a sign of that wrestling. I touch thy heart. Thou hast called me master; thou shalt call me beloved.”

v

Joshua, after he had left the camp and returned a second time to the mountain, waited, scanning the upper cliffs. A day and a night passed; and at length, tired by long vigil, he slept.

He dreamed that the sea had overwhelmed him, and swept him far from the land together with Pharaoh’s charioteers. He was drowned: as a dead body, washed to and fro in the depths. Though life seemed lost, his senses still dreamed. . . . There was light penetrating the water. . . . He saw the surface where wavelets were rippling and

throwing up white caps of spray. Far under, in the calm, forsaken depths, his body was lying. He was not dead, but saw Moses standing on the shore and heard him calling. Plainly he could hear his voice; and, as the sea was divided for the Children of Israel to pass through, so was it again divided. He walked on dry land, he ran. Then as he ran, he saw that the light, which held back the water, was coming from Moses, whose face seemed illuminated with unearthly brightness. In a short while he would reach the bank where Moses stood.

Joshua awoke, and, looking up, saw Moses standing beside him. He cried out in his surprise: "Master, have you come again? I had thought, perhaps, you were dead, but I see from the shining of your face that you have been in the presence of the Lord God."

"It is well," said Moses smiling. "You were stubborn in your doubt when we parted; how is it you are changed?"

"I dreamed a dream," said Joshua, rubbing his eyes.

"No matter; let the dream rest. Have you food, for I am hungry?"

They rested, eating the food, which Joshua had brought. After they had eaten, Moses showed the two stone slabs on which he had written the

law. Keenly Joshua scrutinised the marks going this way and that, yet he could not read them for he knew not the art of letters. To him they seemed like a strange magic, and looking from the stone slabs to the face of Moses, which still shone as in his dream, it seemed as though Yahweh himself might have written those strange marks on the stones.

Together they went down the precipitous decline, Joshua leading, testing the way, for Moses was heavily laden. Their path led far from any view or sound of the camp, but coming of a sudden round a bluff, they heard many voices shouting. Joshua said: "Is that not the sound of war in the camp? What if the Amalekites are again attacking?"

"I do not think it is the sound of war. The voices that I hear are not those of men who cry out for mastery. They are the voices of those who dance and sing."

They pressed on, and coming round a shoulder of the mountain, saw the plain and the camp beneath them.

On a rising ground near the camp was an altar and beside it a golden image shone in the sunlight. Aaron in his long white robe had already slain the sacrifice, and was waving an offering before the image. Each time he bent and straightened himself, the people shouted, and when at length he paused, those who were nearest went down on

hands and knees to lick the blood from the stones. They shouted and sang, the women loosening their hair and clashing cymbals.

Moses stood as still as the crag, on which his hand leaned for support. In the stillness of his anger burned contempt. The calm of Sinai was shattered. He saw only the Golden Calf and the degradation of its worship. His God became an angry God, one who would winnow the hearts of false worshippers, till all they held dear, even the last thing they held for themselves, had been cast away. Was this vile orgy sacrifice? A pretence, the *opposite* of sacrifice . . . an indulgence and debasement to dance before a lifeless image. He forgot that he carried God's message. The tables of the law became a weight in his hands with which to punish. He slowly lifted them above his head, then, with a cry of anguish and a swift violent hurling, cast them towards the people. They crashed down the mountain, over and over, leaping from boulder to boulder.

Regardless of the steep descent, Moses ran till he reached the camp. Those who saw his wild aspect made way in fear. He dashed the offering from Aaron's hands. Snatching one of the hammers, used for the fashioning of the image, he struck the Golden Calf from its pediment. With hammer raised, he turned on Aaron.

“ Dist thou make this image ? ”

Aaron, looking on the ground, twitching his lips and eyebrows, did not answer.

“ What did they do, that thou shouldst bring so great a sin on them ? Wouldst thou raise forms to exclude the true God ? An idol in the shape of a beast ! Speak ! Answer ! ”

“ Let not thy anger wax hot : thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief.”

“ Thou puttest the blame on them ? ”

In a low voice Aaron answered : “ They said to me : Make us gods to go before us ; as for you, they knew not what had become of you, and I knew not either.”

Moses swung the hammer against the golden-plated body of the calf. “ Stand aside ! See how they shall pay for their sin ! ” To Joshua he said : “ Call the fighting men, even the Levites. Whoever is on the Lord’s side, let him to me ! ”

Disorder spread through the gathering. The dancing had ceased. Men were questioning each other : “ Why does he break the Golden Calf and spoil the occasion ? Does he threaten Aaron ? Will he kill him ? ” There were some that called out : “ He has returned from the dead. Let us run to our tents.”

When Joshua’s trumpet sounded, the Levites came pushing through the crowd and rallied about

their leader. Moses said: "Break the image so that nothing remains." When they had hacked the covering of golden plates, and had broken the wooden core to splinters, he commanded: "Take every man his sword and slay the idolaters, spare no man, even though he be brother or father. Let the idolaters die."

Moses stood beside the broken image, and watched the slaughter. The elation of his anger slowly departed; a bitter sadness took its place.

VI

In the evening, tired by their fierce zeal, the Levites returned one by one, or in small groups to where Moses, alone, save for two companions, remained beside the broken image. With hair and clothes wild from the wilderness, he stood gazing on the dead and dying, and though his body did not move, he seemed, for his very stillness, the more deeply plunged in conflict. On his right was Aaron, biting his lips, as was his wont, raising and contracting his brows and looking on the ground. On his left was Korah, who as a man seemed as powerful as Moses, and of more massive build. He stood with arms folded on his chest, his head held squarely on his bull neck. His glance, resting alike on slayers and slain, seemed impassive and aloof. He had not

stirred when the other idolaters had fled; with no sign of fear had stood his ground. As Moses had sunk into inward thoughts, so Korah seemed to have sunk into as deep a cogitation.

The returning Levites waited at a distance. Since Moses did not seem to see them, Joshua came forward. "Give us your commands," he said.

Sternly Moses answered: "Consecrate yourselves to Yahweh. Provide yourselves with sacrifices. If the Lord God should choose to put his special blessing on you for this day's faithfulness, be at all times ready, each man, to go against brother or son, if so commanded, for the Lord's sake."

At these words, Korah said scornfully, and in bold voice: "Already their swords are wet with brother's blood. If there has not yet been enough blood-letting, bid them go slay their children. That sacrifice may be acceptable to Yahweh!"

Moses turned with unexpected mildness. "You speak with the bitterness of my own heart," he said, "but that bitterness I restrain; for God is merciful and full of loving kindness for them that keep his commandments. For those who go contrary, he will make plagues far worse to bear than death by the sword."

Yet in scorn Korah answered: "For you who understand his ways, it is well. He is too distant for mankind."

For a moment Korah looked Moses in the eyes, then turned aside. And Moses, as he turned to go to his tent, was perplexed, for he felt that Korah's words might seem true when spoken before men, though they were false when spoken before God. To Joshua he said: "My heart is heavy. I will go alone. Let no man come near me." Then to his brother: "To-morrow I will go again into the wilderness; peradventure I may make atonement for their sin."

VII

When he came again to the crags of Sinai, Moses contemplated that vast barenness of granite. The silence was like a well of infinite depth; into its waters his thought fell without disturbance. "Who are the idolaters?" he questioned, and his heart answered: "Those who mistake the limitations of an image for life that does not cease. Gazing on the red rocks and their dark shadows, he saw sharp and hard in light and shadow, the law: The idolater must die. Where his worship is, his hope is also. If his worship is in a thing of stone or metal, it will perish and his hope with it.

Still gazing on the cliffs and precipices, and seeing again in memory the bodies of the slain, thinking of the needs of the living, his heart moved in pity. He cried out in supplication to that stern solitude:

" Forgive them their ignorance. If need be, let me perish in their place. If need be, blot me out of the book which thou hast written, but let them live."

" Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book."

His thought became numb, till a voice of hope whispered: " The angel of the eternal shall be with them."

Against this whisper of comfort echoed again the voice of the law: " Nevertheless in the day of my visit, I will visit their sin upon them."

He cried out: " Yahweh, Lord of Life, show me thy ways that I may know thee ! "

Silence swallowed his words, yet his prayer waxed and grew, inarticulate, yet formed and particular as a spear of grass, thrusting from the soil. " Let me have knowledge of the heavens above and of the heavens beneath, and how they are divided; of how you have created in the heavens the stars from out the horror of the abyss, of how you have made the plants to grow, and the animals to roam over the desert, seeking their prey; fill me with the breath of your life, that I may lead my people, that they may become in truth Thy people."

" My presence will go with thee, and I will give thee rest."

" We will be a special people, O God, dedicated to the understanding of Thy ways."

Forgetful of earth under him and sky above, he felt only the promise speaking to his heart: "I will do the thing thou hast desired."

"Show me also thy glory."

His prayer, like the thin edge of a shell slipping into deep water with scarce a ripple, and sinking, was swallowed in silence. At the stillness he trembled at the abysses, opening to engulf him. Feeling the rock under his hands, he pressed his body into a cleft in the mountain side. Only by touch was he conscious of earth, for to his vision the solid world was transparent. All had disappeared but the crystal shapes of the dissolving rocks, these flashed as cubes, tetrahedrons, octahedrons, romboids and monoklinics. Streams of light met from all sides and formed them.

Fear came from the abyss, and the voice of God: "Thou canst not see my face: for man shall not see me and live."

As Jacob contended, so now did Moses. The will of his spirit penetrated the crystal forms.

With pain and a sense of frustration there rose the figure of Reuel, his garments spattered with blood. In the heart of Reuel, he saw, like a black worm, the fear, which was his need of atonement. He saw the Levites killing the people, the bleeding bodies heaped about the Golden Calf. He saw the blanched face of Aaron. His own anger was

like a red mist, smirching the sunlight. Looking deep into his soul, he saw that the Golden Calf stood unbroken. Again he cast it down, crumbling it to dust. He heard a voice crying: "I, Yahweh, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, upon the third and fourth generation."

The crystal plains had vanished, and where the form of Reuel had floated, he saw the weaving and flowing tides of sleepful, waking life. He saw the underworld of Tiamaat, filled with merged forms of beasts and plants. In the midst was the red heart of man, pulsing slowly, and in the viscous stream the forms passed to and fro.

Daimons arose, figures with hair of serpents, figures of horses with human heads, trees with live hands for leaves, lions with heads of angels. He saw the gods of Egypt, all the animal divinities . . . the sacred bull, begotten by lightning on a virgin heifer.

The sands of the desert covered them, yet rising from the sand, half buried, the great sphinx stared with open eyes, she purred and moved her tail.

Sea swallowed the desert. Blood was on the sea, blood of the sacrifice of the first-born, and in the blood swam the worm of fear. It changed and grew, it became a fish; it was Leviathan, the crooked

monster of the deep. It swallowed all things. It rushed roaring with open mouth.

It became more terrible; no longer an animal, it was human. From human it was divine, and the voice of Yahweh sounded over the sea of terror.

“Behold now Behemoth, which I made with thee;
Lo now his strength is in his loins,
And his force is in the muscles of his belly.
He moveth his tail like a cedar:
And the sinues of his stones are wrapped together.
He is the beginning of the ways of God.”

Moses cried out, covering his eyes with his hands:
“Is this indeed God?”

The vision had vanished. The only living thing he could see was an eagle hovering high in air. Watching the extended wings, he was lifted far from the fear of Behemoth.

Looking around him, rubbing his eyes, stretching his limbs: Surely, he thought, that was a strange vision. While I stood here in the cleft of the rock, God passed by me. He did not show his face, only the crooked serpent of the deep.

Around him the wilderness was running with little streams from the recent storm. Green plants were already sprouting between stones. As he turned towards the camp, a prophetic voice sang in him.

"The eyes of the blind shall be opened,
And the ears of the deaf unstopped,
The lame shall leap as an hart,
And the tongue of the dumb, sing:
For in the wilderness shall waters break out,
And streams in the desert
And the parched ground shall be a pool,
And the thirsty land springs of water:
In the habitation of jackals where each lay,
Shall be grass and reeds and rushes.
And a highway shall be there, and a way,
And it shall be called the way of holiness."

VIII

After the dead bodies were buried, and the time of mourning passed, Moses called a meeting of the tribes. "From this time forth," he said, "Israel will worship the Lord God, and walk on his commandments. Choose from among you a High Priest. Go to your tents, consider who you will elect, and in the evening be ready with your choice."

Then he called Bezaleel, the son of Uri, and told him to build the Tent of God at a short distance from the camp.

Bezaleel, who was the finest worker in wood and metal of any man, went with his friend Aholiab to cut the straightest acacia saplings that grew on Sinai; he told the women of his tribe to weave ten lengths of goat-hair, for the curtains.

Meanwhile the tribesmen in groups and families

talked of whom they should choose. Some said Moses should be High Priest: he who is nearest to God should be the chosen mediator between God and man. Others spoke of Joshua, arguing that he would lead them better in war, if, before battle, he mounted the steps of the altar and took council with Yahweh for the disposition of troops. There were some that spoke for Korah, saying that by sorceries he could placate the anger of God. His rule would be gentle, neither exacting too little, nor expecting too much. Korah would know with a smile and a laugh how to take the circuitous path, when the straight way seemed difficult. Korah would smile and be human. Many others said that Aaron should be High Priest; he understood the ways of men, their weaknesses and needs. He who had known how to bend before the power of Egypt, would know how to propitiate a jealous God. And though Korah, they answered, was good at going round difficulties, Aaron was not a man to mistake the impossible for the possible. If he had offered sacrifice to the Golden Calf, he had done so at the behest of the people: no small thing to have as High Priest a man who would do their bidding. . . . Even as well or better would he sacrifice to Yahweh. Aaron would be cunning at petitioning, even as when asking privilege from the taskmasters. Better to choose Aaron than Moses.

To the majority this advice seemed the wisest, and when in the evening they gave decision, Shaphet stood forth as spokesman and said: "God has chosen Moses to be our leader, but we choose Aaron for High Priest."

IX

Bezaleel pitched the Tent of Meeting on a low knoll beside the camp. The ark of acacia wood stood in the middle of the tent, and was supported on four staves at each corner. On the upper side he set rings of gold through which could be thrust poles, that it might be carried from place to place. When he had finished, he went with Moses to show his work. "I have made it simply, as you directed," he said. "It would have been easy to add ornaments, but I have only used acacia wood, smoothed it and polished. Gold rings for the poles. The curtains of the best goat-hair."

Moses walked round the tent, viewing it from all sides, then lifting the curtain, entered with Bezaleel. As they stood within the quietness of the enclosed space, and saw the ark on its four uprights, Moses became thoughtful. At length he said: "Did you guess that the measurements I gave for the sanctuary are the same as are recorded in the writings of the secret cults as the sacred numbers and measurements of man?"

"No. I knew it not."

"Yet so it is." Moses looked earnestly at Bezaleel. "In those writings it is recorded, and truly, that all things that we see have their counterpart in worlds unseen. This tent is built according to the sacred numbers, and by their secret power, he who stands within, can be, if he so will, in the presence of the Eternal."

"This tent," Moses continued, "shall be the place of worship for Israel. Worship is not in words, but in feeling and action. What the hand does shall be the sign of the heart's understanding. For this truth priests of all ages have made sacrifice. To-morrow I, too, will build an altar and make burnt-offering; blood shall be poured on the ground and flesh burnt. In these actions each man shall perceive what his heart counsels; their worth cannot be spoken." Abruptly he asked: "Will the people confound the burnt-offering and sacrifice that I establish with the false worship of the Golden Calf?"

Bezaleel, answered: "Many will see only the slaughter of beasts and smell only the roasting of flesh."

Moses, who had questioned in doubt, seemed, to have received an inner assurance. "There are hidden influences," he said. "No man knows what God reveals to another."

Bezaleel waited while Moses brooded, looking at the ark of acacia wood, with its four golden rings at the corners. At length he said: "Go back now, and leave me here alone."

That night he kindled the fire of Yahweh outside the Tent of Meeting. All night he remained within, and the people, peeping under their tent curtains, wondered what he was doing there alone, while the fire of God was burning.

X

In the morning, helped by Aaron and his four sons, Moses built a square altar of turfs and loose stones. About the Tent the tribes gathered in a wide semi-circle, and those that could not see for the crowd, climbed on to rocks and boulders.

Stripped of his outer garment, Moses stood in short tunic with bare arms and knees; his long knife was thrust through his girdle. The morning sun's light lit the red strands in his hair and beard. Standing beside the altar, facing the hushed multitude, he sprinkled holy oil, and anointed Aaron and his sons. With a brand from the fire of Yahweh, he kindled the high brushwood on the altar. When it had burnt to a red glow, he spoke: "The fire is consecrated to Life and Death also. No man shall

make fire for sacrifice, save he make it to Death and Sheol as well as to Life and Glory. ”

He signed that a bullock be brought forward for sin-offering. As he drew the knife he cried: “ May this victim be accepted in place of the people ! ” The blood gushed at the base of the altar ; the fat and inwards were burnt as sign of submission, but the carcass, a token of sin, was taken far from the camp and burned.

A ram was dragged forward by the horns.

“ This offering shall be burnt as propitiation, and token of submission.”

When he had killed it, he sprinkled the blood on the altar. The head and inwards were offered, then all that remained given to the fire.

He took a second ram, and bade Aaron place his hand on its head while he slew it. As Reuel had done in Midian, he put blood on Aaron’s right ear, on the toe of his right foot, and on the thumb of his right hand ; he sprinkled oil and blood on Aaron and his sons, and said to them: “ Take the flesh and boil it at the entrance of the Tent, and there eat it.”

While the flesh was cooking the people remained hushed and watchful, but after Moses and Aaron had gone into the Tent, they crowded, with buzzing of talk, about the altar, and dipped their fingers in the blood.

XI

In his tent Korah gave hospitality to his friends. His sons, Assir and Elkanah, handed wine in silver flagons, spiced quales on skewers, pastries and dates. Outside whistled a bleak wind, yet within was comfort and convivial meeting. "When the people worshipped the Golden Calf," said Korah, "they knew what they were doing. They could see and know, but in this new religion, they worship an abstraction."

"I am with you there," said Dathan with a laugh, "though Moses seems to get something out of it."

"'Tis what he puts in, I object to," said Abiram. "I thought we had seen the last of him, but he comes back with not only ten new commandments, but with more laws than I can ever learn: more than he and Aaron can enforce, I'm sure."

"Since the Golden Calf, Aaron has not counted for much!"

"Though he is High Priest, Moses holds him in the palm of his hand."

"A pity they did not elect you."

Korah shrugged his shoulders. "Moses would not allow that. For the present we must bend to what he allows."

"For the present?" echoed Dathan.

Korah gave him a glance, but did not speak.

"Now that Moses has come back, no one knows how long we shall have to stay in this cursed place," grumbled Abiram. "Though we suffered in Egypt, the nights were not so cold!"

"This tent," said one of the guests, "is the only place in camp where a man can feel at ease and speak freely."

"You do me honour," said Korah suavely. "I am glad my tent is congenial. But do not," he added, "do not take this new worship of Yahweh too seriously. In Egypt we did not let the worship of the gods trouble us." With irony he looked at his friends, and continued. "Do not over-rate the gods, they can be as easily offended by being over-valued as by neglect. Yahweh or the Golden Calf, it does not matter much . . . all is in the manner of approach."

Assir, his eldest son, who with grave expression had been listening, questioned: "If that is so, father, do you say that there is something greater than the gods?"

Korah nodded.

"What is that?"

As though unwillingly, he answered gruffly: "Man's own life. . . . Don't you know that. Don't you feel it?"

"His life?" Assir questioned.

"His will, if that makes it clearer; his courage, his manhood."

At this moment the outer tent flap was lifted, and the two young priests, Nadab and Abihu, stood in the entrance. "Come in," called Korah genially, "come in and sit with us." Then with dry raillery. "You are welcome and have come at the right moment to give us, as anointed priests, your instruction. . . . Elkanah, give them wine and dates. . . . Make yourselves at ease."

"We may not accept wine," said Abihu, "but seeing the light within, we were so bold."

"I am glad you came. Be seated, and as for refusing wine. I will hear none of it. Fill their cups."

"As priests we may not, at this time."

Korah laughed his deep hearty laugh. "To refuse wine in the name of the priesthood, since when was that? There fill their cups at once! Drink it down, it will warm your hearts."

Accepting the wine, the young men took places on the divan. "Certainly it is warming on a cold night like this."

"The beginning of wisdom," said Korah. "Continue, continue . . . let us have more of it."

The young men laughed, excusing themselves, and Dathan said: "'Tis for *you* to continue and in-

struct us. . . . We were speaking of the gods. . . . You had said that man's will was greater."

All who were present were eager to hear Korah speak, yet he was silent for a while. With dry, yet not offensive mockery he began: "I speak under correction of the priests of Yahweh, who are present. Assir has asked me: What is greater than the gods, and I had said: Man's will. Has not man made the gods as tokens of his longings and his needs. . . . ? This which I speak of lies near to the heart of a man and his fate. As he grows in perception, courage and manhood, he will find himself and his own will balanced against the outer world, and all that is not himself. As he grows, he grows in conflict and must answer: Which shall master the other? It may be, he flinches, sinks back into easy acquiescence, bending his will, and calling his submission his fate. Then he takes comfort, follows an old tradition, and, turning back from his own life, seeks a reconciliation with the death which is already in his heart. . . . Or it may be, his manly will rises in him, and by the power of magic and The Mysteries, he subjects the outer world to his progressing, expanding desires. If he can do that, he is a man indeed. Great and unending is the struggle. He must never falter, never cease to worship life in himself. His god shall be an image of that life."

He paused, and the others, listening, were silent.

"For the uninitiate," Korah continued, "it does not matter whether they worship Yahweh or the Golden Calf, so long as their needs are gratified; but for the man of understanding, gods are only signs; he has become his own god, his own standard bearer."

A murmur of admiration greeted these words. Aware of the questioning glances of the young priests, Korah turned towards them and said: "Moses has decreed, following the tradition of that failing spirit, that the fire on the altar shall be kindled not only to Yahweh and Glory but to Death and Sheol. It is a tradition come from the old and weary. Even in the kindling of fire it makes admission of defeat. This is a weakness, excusable in the old. . . . But in the young? What think you?"

Nadab and Abihu did not answer, but their cheeks flushed.

Still fixing on them his blue, protruding eyes, Korah asked: "Would you not wish to be men?" He changed his tone to his accustomed irony: "No, my children, do nothing of the sort. Forget my words! You are Aaron's sons, and must do as Moses prescribes. No. . . . No answer. I will have no answer! Forget what I have said! Elkanah, more wine. Let no one forget the good things. More wisdom in wine and spiced food than in much talking."

XII

Nadab and Abihu went early to the Tent of Meeting, taking with them a company of young men and women for whom they would kindle a fire after a new fashion. In the Tent, they anointed themselves with holy oil; it ran from their shoulders, and soaked in to the coarse white wool. They piled high the brushwood, and filled their censers with sandal wood, acacia twigs and sweet-smelling herbs. Nadab spoke to those who had followed from the camp: "We are no longer bound by out-worn tradition. What have we, who are young, to do with Death and Sheol? We worship Life! See, we kindle a fire, which in itself is enough. No need for sacrifice. In our censers are sweet-smelling woods and herbs. No need for blood, or the offerings of entrails still warm and moving from the corpse.

He lit the wood in his own and his brother's censer, then kindled the high pile of brushwood. Flames sprang up; there was crackling and flying of sparks.

They turned their backs on the altar, and facing the people, began to intone a song.

The first words had hardly been uttered, before some spark must have blown on to the oil,

soaked garments of Abihu, which blazed in sudden flame. Nadab ran to help his brother, but hardly had he laid hands on him, but his garments also caught fire.

The young men screamed in anguish, and, enveloped each in a flame, struggled wildly for a few seconds, then sank groaning on the ground.

When Moses and Aaron reached the Tent, Nadab and Abihu were already dead, and the fire on the altar, which had kindled so quickly, was burnt to ashes.

"They offered the fire in a strange manner before God," said those who had witnessed the burning, and were now trembling for their own fate. "God in his anger has consumed them."

"The Lord will be sanctified," said Moses, "in them that come near him. He has said: 'In them that come nigh me, I will shew myself holy. I will glorify myself.' These men, knowing not Life nor God, were unsanctified by humility; they died in their presumption."

Aaron was about to loosen his hair and tear his clothes as sign of mourning, but Moses said: "The priests of God shall not make mourning for personal loss. The whole people shall bewail this burning which the Lord hath kindled. They shall all mourn."

CHAPTER V

THE JUDGMENT SEAT

I

THERE was a ravine near the camp ending in a harsh slope of talus. Hills, in nipped horse-shoe, hemmed in this barren, waterless valley. From one end only was it accessible to human feet, a way leading upward over fallen boulders, through narrow defiles. Within opened a wide space of littered stones. Here, at sunset, was gathered a concourse of people; they had thrust two of their number, a man and a young woman, into the centre, and stood round in a close, thick circle.

Moses had clambered to a ledge of rock on the northern hillside, and, raised above the crowd, he watched the scene with arms folded within his cloak. The sound of voices rose and struck on his ears in a fierce and mingled muttering. His brow contracted, and the deep lines of his face hardened. This voice from the crowd, about to execute his judgment, was not like the voice of any man that he had known, it was more sullen and brutish. And

through that muttered undertone of mingled talk, there came sharp cries for mercy. The woman was fallen on her knees, and, with hands clasped, screamed words he could not hear.

He searched to see whether Korah and his sons were there, and knew not whether he was sorry or relieved to find them absent. With a quick lift of his head, he gave the command for the execution.

They did not need to bend for the first stones; they held them ready in their hands. The broken pieces of talus flew through the air, some missing, some hitting their mark; he could hear the peculiar thud with which they struck the yielding flesh. Screams and shouts of pain rose above the sound of breath drawn sharply beneath teeth, like the hiss of hot metal cooled in water.

The man, covering his head with his arms, had run wildly towards the edge of the circle, but the stones met him, thudding heavily his ribs. He turned back, and, for a moment lowering his arms, looked around bewildered. A heavy fragment of rock struck his face; he screamed, then stumbled with bowed head under the falling blows. The woman still sunk on her knees, raised her hands in supplication. On so easy a mark stones pounded heavily on breast and face; bruised and blood-stained, she swayed backward and lay gasping. The granite thudded her flesh so long as even a groan

answered. The man also had fallen, still clasping his head in his arms. The crowd closed in, and at near range pounded his back with heavy missiles till blood broke out, and he turned on his side with no breath left in him.

From his ledge on the rock, Moses had watched without movement. And while the people gathered in groups about the dead, he remained apart in the solitude of his own thought. The condemned must die according to the law, for without the uttermost exaction the blood of the people would become polluted. The Children of Israel would fail to be the chosen of the Lord.

The utterance of their mingled voices was now changed: still sullen, it was less fierce, but with a note of tiredness. Had he caught his mood from the people?

To drag the bodies aside and cover them in the loose talus took but a little time, yet he grew impatient, that while sorting their cloaks, laid aside for the stoning, the people should look at him with questioning glances, as though expecting he should come down and mingle with the crowd. Let them go first; he would follow at his own time!

It was twilight ere the last had departed. Voices no longer troubled him; the frown cleared from his brow. He clambered down to the lower level and there stood, listening to the silence. He did

not go over to the place where the bodies were buried, but regarded for a short while the stains of blood on the stones; then with slow steps he walked towards the narrowed neck of the valley, paused and looked back. Darkly the hills rose against the evening sky. Moses knelt and prostrated himself, bending his head to earth. In a low voice he repeated words from the song which he had sung, when on the far side of the mountain, high up above the lower ridges of the world, he had seen a thorn-bush burning with the presence of God.

"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made: thou art God from everlasting and world without end.

"Thou turnest man to destruction: again thou sayest, come again ye children of men."

II

Among those returning to the camp was Kabaz, and by his side Helon and Amminadab. The natures of these three had little in common; they had come together through lack of better company.

Old Kabaz, his beard nodding as he went, struck the ground with his stick at each footstep. Amminadab at his side said: "See there is blood running from your hand down your staff. Have you wounded yourself?"

“ As I flung it, a rough stone cut me.”

“ Well for our hands that we were not all so eager in the casting of stones,” said Helon.

Kabaz, scenting in the words a veiled mockery, gave Helon a sharp glance. “ Some there were that did not even remove their cloaks, so heedless are they of justice.”

“ Not heedless of justice,” said Helon in his dry, unimpassioned voice, “ but more anxious to witness than to perform. And you, Amminadab, I did not see you casting stones so eagerly as worthy Kabaz.”

“ I, I was there with the rest,” said Amminadab.

“ The eye of Moses was upon you.”

Amminadab, a stout man of pleasant bearing and a friendly mien, was not certain whether Helon was mocking him. He smiled and answered: “ Doubtless upon us all.”

“ Yes,” said Helon, “ and did you not see how his gaze wandered, though he stood there as still as any tree stump? I think he looked for Korah.”

“ And what if he were to have seen him? ” questioned Kabez with a truculent note, divining in Helon a nature alien to his own.

“ He would doubtless have been glad, for then he would have known that he who was in his thoughts was also under his eye.”

“ What mean you? ”

"Nothing more than my words say," said Helon, tempting Kabaz to question further, and himself to give voice to his shrewd imaginings.

"You mean, there is no love lost between them?" prompted Amminadab.

"Less love less trust, then the upper and lower mill-stone know; yet these two great princes of our people work on each other silently. Each feels the other even when no corn is grinding."

"And not in friendship?" said Amminadab.

"No, but in rivalry. Their two different natures are, by each other, made more different."

"That is true. When Moses was in the mountain, no one was more sure that he was lost than Korah. His wish, I think, was father to the thought. It was he, men say, that prompted Aaron to make the Golden Calf."

"Speak not of that," said Kabaz, crossly. "Korah alone dared stand fast beside the altar when Moses destroyed the image."

"He remained to defy him."

"He dare not."

"Whatever Korah lacks, he has courage," said Helon. "His wisdom is his forbearance. Korah is well with the people; he has pity for their weaknesses. Should we have seen this stoning had Korah been the leader?"

"'Tis well he is not," said Kabaz. "The sin of

the guilty must be punished. But you do wrong in doubting him."

"Not I who doubted," answered Helon suavely. "I said they work upon one another secretly. Moses would be less harsh if Korah were not in the camp. Indeed, I think," he added, shrugging his shoulders, "that the commands of Yahweh might grind less cruelly, were Korah and Moses not at enmity."

Kabaz, checked in his downward stride, lifted his head and beard, and eyed Helon frowningly. "What! Think you that the word of God can be changed by the condition of men's minds?"

"The Gods of the Egyptians did not speak so cruelly."

"The Egyptians were vile idolaters. You are little better. . . . At the stoning, you did not remove your cloak. . . ."

With a smile of contempt, Helon met the fierce eye of his elder. "It is well that some men should handle stones less eagerly, and cut their hands less often."

"Your words are idleness and folly," answered Kabaz. "Would Moses worship Yahweh according to his liking of Korah? What man has ever heard such talk! Such words are blasphemy. Do men fashion God according to their own mood and liking?"

"Such a thought might be mine," said Helon; then dangerously tempted to speak further, said: "Have you not, friend Kabaz, ever been glad that

men were many and their ways diverse . . . ? True, I did not cast stones, as you did; neither did Amminadab. Yet his thoughts were not mine." Turning to Amminadab he asked: "What was your judgment?"

Amminadab looked from one to the other, hesitated, then said shortly: "Not willingly would I raise my hand to another's harm."

"A very right sentiment," continued Helon in his dry, mocking tone, "yet not mine. The law should be fulfilled, yet without passion. This stoning is too full of human feeling: a self-indulgence, for such as you, Kabaz, to fling stones at another. Law, like thought, should be cold, impersonal."

"The law is from God," said Kabaz fiercely.

"From God perhaps, but men pronounce and execute none the less."

Kabaz came a step nearer, his dark eyes alight with anger. "Would you follow human understanding or the will of God?"

"Need they be at variance?"

"Do not quibble with me. Which?"

"When God speaks it were a pity should a man be so lost in his own thoughts as not to hear Him," said Helon, unable to suppress his mocking smile.

"But for yourself?" The words came harshly from the old man's throat.

"I desire to hear and to understand what I hear."

"Has not God spoken to Moses?"

“I know not.”

“Did you not see the chariots of Pharaoh overwhelmed in the sea ?”

“The sea and the wind are strong.”

“Ha, you blaspheme !” Kabaz drew up his robe about him. “I will go with you no further step. We shall stand here while you go on alone.”

Helon, despite his outer calm, made no disguise of his contempt. Smiling he said: “No, I will wait; do you go on; I would not wish the good Amminadab to be late for his supper on my account.”

“Blasphemer, blasphemer,” Kabaz repeated, then to Amminadab: “Come, we will leave him. He should be stoned for this offence.”

Helon watched them out of sight. A most vile old man, he thought, polluted with passion and unreason. Then because the contention had put him out of mood, he lingered by the wayside in the gathering darkness.

In a little while he heard footsteps and saw Moses striding upon him, down the ravine. Not wishing then to be found in his path, Helon stood aside, hidden behind rocks, and watched him go by in the half light.

III

On the next day came a messenger, giving news of Jethro, who with a company of followers and with

Zipporah and her sons was journeying from Midian. They were but a short stage distant; in an hour or a little more their caravan should be rounding the hillside; the sheikh Reuel had died; Jethro was now leader of the tribe.

Because to see Jethro again seemed for Moses like a meeting with his past, he set out alone to meet his kinsman. He had proclaimed a holiday, and would not sit in judgment; disputes and accusations could wait until the morrow. Tents should be set for his guests, and sacrifice be made ready. After they had sacrificed, they would feast.

As he walked along the mountain path, he thought of his departure from Midian. How different his present from his earlier state! Then he had been single-handed, now he was a nation.

Time and mighty deeds had changed him, made him stronger, deeper in belief. He would subdue this turbulent people; make soldiers, men of them, and despite their weakness, lead them to the promised land. Heart and sinews were still strong. He would rule by the law, no other way.

For so many days he had sat in the seat of judgment with the people all about him, and the buzzing of their complaints in his ears; far rather would he have preferred solitude. In solitude it was easier to find God than on the seat of judgment.

Even in the midst of them all, he was solitary.

Joshua he could speak with, when together they went into the Tent, yet often Joshua failed to catch his meaning. Aaron, cautious and gentle, served well enough: the high priest, chosen by the people. . . . Korah clearly he felt to be his enemy, yet worthy of respect, almost like a voice out of his own heart contradicting him.

Of his wife, Zipporah, whom he had not seen these many years, he was twi-minded. His blood would not kindle towards her as in Midian. Though again she should share his tent, her life should be in woman's offices; her children, and belike her children's children should be her care.

At a turn of their downward way, he came upon Jethro and his following. As the sheikh of the tribe, Jethro, now that Reuel was dead, stood, for Moses, in the place of his wife's father; to him he did obeisance, bending himself to the ground; then rising, kissed him on both cheeks. To his wife he gave his hand to kiss, and looked with favour on his sons, grown into strong boys, straight as kebuh reeds and bright-eyed.

On the way to the camp, he told what the Lord had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake, of the march in the wilderness, of the fight with Amalek, of water from the rock, and how the Lord God delivered them. When he had finished Jethro said: "Mighty and wonderful is the power

of Yahweh, now may all men know that he is greater than all other gods, in the way in which he has dealt proudly with them, and destroyed the people who follow after them. Now are the Children of Israel returned to the worship of their fathers."

When they came to the camp, Moses took him to the tent of meeting, and showed him the ark, set in the holy place. Together they burnt offerings; and Aaron came and all the elders of Israel to eat the sacrifices at the great feast that had been prepared.

That night they stayed long, telling again adventures of the past. Zipporah sat beside Moses, and at moments feeling her beside him, he would experience the simple kindness of his life in Midian, when as an exile he was free to taste an individual human happiness. Yet these moments were brief. On the morrow he would sit again on the seat of judgment, interpreting the law to the Children of Israel.

IV

Close under the precipitous wall where Sinai's cliff ascended from the plain was set the judgment seat. Here Moses sat to give justice. Twenty paces at his back was the mountain; at a like distance before him a low hillock where the accused and the accuser

stood. Gathered in groups around, the tribes would have completed a circle had not the mountain rocks, in a short arc, cut the circumference.

A man came forward, and standing before the seat of judgment, told the story of his wrong. "Coming from the mountain towards the camp," he said, "I visited my flock in the evening, and when I counted I found there was one lamb missing. I thought, some man or wild beast has stolen, or perchance it has strayed. Yet from its kind it was not likely to stray, being but a lamb, and no sign of blood as when a beast has killed. Surely a thief. I looked carefully at the ground, and there in the dust was a man's footprint. I saw that one foot weighed heavily as though he were carrying a burden. Going down on hands and knees to see the better, I followed, till I came to the camp and the tent of Nahshon, and there on the ground before the tent was poured out the blood, and from within came the sound of burning sticks and the roasting of meat. Within were Nahshon and his wife and son eating the lamb. I found the pelt and it was marked with my mark. I ask justice against Nahshon, who has stolen and killed my lamb."

Moses called to the accused: "What have you to say against this charge?"

"It was my own lamb that I had killed and was eating in my tent."

“What of the mark on it?”

“It was my own mark.”

“Is the pelt here?”

“It is, but when I was cutting up the flesh, the mark was destroyed, so that neither I nor Zuar, who accuses me, can know it.”

“The mark was on the back, was it not?”

“Yes.”

“It is usual to open a sheep from the belly.”

“It is usual, but in this case as I cut off the head, not thinking there would be a charge against me, I destroyed the mark.”

Moses considered for a while in silence.

“No matter. Have you the ewe that was the dam of your lamb?”

“She is in my flock.”

Then to Zuar: “Have you the ewe that was the dam of your lamb?”

“Yes, she is in my flock.”

“Let both the ewes be brought hither and bring also a living lamb, of the size of the one that has been killed.”

When these had been brought at his command Moses said: “Tie the pelt of the dead lamb on the living lamb, and let it run with the two ewes.”

The lamb ran to the ewes to suck at their dugs. It ran first to the ewe of Nahshon, but she would not suffer it, then to the ewe of Zuar, who smelling

on it the pelt of her own lamb, let it suck at her dug.

Then said Moses: "Because Nahshon has stolen the lamb of Zuar, he shall pay fourfold, four lambs for one lamb." To Nahshon he said: "Go now and fetch the recompense, and do not again do evil in the sight of the Lord Yahweh, who shall surely separate the evil from the good."

v

Another man came forward: "I was going away a three days' journey into the wilderness, and I delivered my flock of seven goats and my she-asses to my neighbour that he should tend them for me, and when I returned, one of my goats had died. I demand now that he should make recompense for the goat which is dead."

Moses asked of the man who was accused: "Did you take all care of the beasts that were left in your charge?"

"I did, even as with my own."

"Then why, think you, did the goat die?"

"She may have eaten some poisonous herb, or perhaps may have died of old age. She was a very old goat."

"Will you take oath you took all reasonable care of what was given into your charge, that in no

way you wilfully brought about the death of your neighbour's goat?"

"I am willing to take oath, and indeed I grieve for his loss."

When he had taken oath, Moses said: "His word shall be accepted and no recompense need be given."

A third stood forward who said: "I have a charge to bring against my neighbour Ochran. His bull is fierce and fought with one of my oxen and killed it. Let me have justice of him."

Moses said: "Let the bull be sold, and the price be divided between you. The dead beast you shall also divide."

Then quickly stood forward another man: "Against Ochran I also have a charge on account of this same bull: on the day after it had gored the beast of my neighbour, it broke loose again and gored one of my beasts, that soon after died. Give me justice."

Moses answered: "Because Ochran had known that his was a fierce bull, that it had gored another, yet he had not kept it within bounds; because of this negligence shall he pay beast for beast, a live beast for the dead, but the dead beast shall be his own."

Again a man came forward calling out: "This is not the worst. His bull is a monster of fierceness and should not live. It attacks not only beasts

of its own kind but men. He has wounded my maid-servant. With great difficulty did I and my two sons take her from his horns. Even now she lies sick within the tent."

"Is this so indeed?"

Several voices cried out: "There is no doubt of it."

"Ochran shall pay thirty shekels of silver for the maid-servant that has been gored, and the bull shall be taken without the camp and tied to a strong tree, and stoned with stones till he is dead."

In this way did Moses give justice between the people, weighing and deciding the charges they brought one against another. Many there were that came for justice and received recompense.

Then as the day drew towards noon, there stood forward Phinehas, the captain of the Levite guard, and said: "I bring a charge against Nahash, the son of Ithra, that he has broken the sabbath. On the sabbath day he took with him his axe, and went into the wilderness and cut saplings and gathered sticks, and returned bearing them in a bundle on his back."

Moses's face darkened, and he said to Nahash: "Stand forth and answer the charge which is brought against you."

Nahash came forward unwillingly and said: "There is indeed some truth in what Phinehas says.

There are in my tent many that look to me for support. I must labour long and hard. I thought there was little harm if, on the sabbath morning, I should go gather sticks in the wilderness, where few men would see me, that I might have firing for my household, made ready against the days of labour."

"Know you not," said Moses, "that the sabbath is a gift of God?"

"I have heard that said," answered Nahash, gaining in courage. "Is not God pleased that men should help themselves?"

"Indeed, but not as you suppose, if you would waste his holy day in common occupations."

Moses paused in thought, and sinking into himself, remained silent for a while. The people waited, murmuring together, saying that he inquired of the Lord Yahweh his will. He rose from his seat, and spoke again to Nahash: "There is a life within each man, greater than daily tasks. On the sabbath it is commanded he should rest, and, looking within himself, find the stillness from which he is created. The sabbath is no day for brutish idleness, nor is it a day for common tasks."

Then speaking to the tribes: "If you kept not the sabbath, in what would ye be the chosen people? We wander in the wilderness and contend with obstacles, yet a day is put apart. On the sabbath

God himself rested. Strictly must it be observed, for if we keep it not, we forget our birthright. Always must you remember the commandments of God. For this reason you wear fringes on your garments, that when you look on them you may remember."

Again he paused, and again the people murmured, waiting his decision. Speaking now to Nahash he continued: "A man who slighteth the rest and blessedness of the sabbath, does injury to Yahweh, and is already estranged from the eternal. Should a nation follow such a man, it would come to destruction. Better that one life be forfeit, than that a people fall into error. Therefore he that breaketh the sabbath shall be taken without the camp and stoned with stones till he be dead."

"I did but gather sticks," said Nahash. "Little labour in that!" Then in anger, he cried out: "The law by which you condemn me is a cruel law. In Egypt though the task-masters beat us, they killed no man for so light an offence." Then since Moses did not answer, he cried out again: "Why, shall all men be made after one pattern? For some it may seem well to sit apart brooding on no man knows what; for others better to be about the tasks of life. I call again for justice, and if you will condemn me, your judgment shall seem a mockery and a shame for all time."

Moses did not answer, but gave a sign that the guards, who stood there in readiness, should seize Nahash and carry him away.

VI

Kabaz came forward in the open space before Moses: "I accuse Helon. He is a blasphemer, and has blasphemed the name of God."

"Is Helon present that he may hear and answer the charge?" said Moses.

Helon was called and came to stand opposite Kabaz in the place of judgment.

Moses looked sternly from under his brows at Kabaz, and said: "Make now your accusation. Remember that in so doing you bring a heavy charge against your neighbour."

Kabaz answered unabashed: "He spoke lightly of the command of God, and mocked at those that followed the ordinance of the Most High; and, when I pressed him, and put it to him, whether he would follow his own understanding or the command of God, he answered: 'I would follow my own understanding.'"

Moses turned now to Helon, who had stood watching his accuser with his accustomed, mocking smile playing about his mouth. "What say you to this accusation?"

"His words speak in part the truth," Helon answered coolly, "though I think his mind is so clouded with hatred for his fellow man, that he knows little of truth or of the God of whom he speaks."

"Can you declare what you said?" asked Moses.

"Let him who accuses me, speak first."

"He has made his accusation, and has declared that you would set your own understanding above the word of God. What do you mean by your own understanding?"

"What my mind holds true, apart from the passion of the moment."

"There may be no sin in that, but now answer plainly. Look around upon these mountains, up at the firmament above, and the earth at your feet. Did not God make them?" Since Helon remained silent, he continued: "In the wilderness, listening to the silence, and beholding this mountain raise its precipitous walls to the sky, have you not felt your blood moved by the presence of the Eternal?"

"I have seen the mountains and the sky," said Helon, "and I have listened to the silence, but they have not helped my understanding of the law, or why one thing should follow in consequence upon another."

Moses paused again for a few moments, then he said: "When we were in bondage in Egypt, did you

not see the plagues that fell on the Egyptians? Did not the wrath of Yahweh destroy their cattle and their pastures and the standing crops, and in the end did not his angel Samael visit their first-born? Did not the waters divide for us and close on the chariots of Pharaoh? Were not the bitter springs turned sweet, and the water brought from the rock for our refreshment? Do you not see in all these things the power of Yahweh?"

Keenly Helon eyed his judge and said: "Do you?"

"Assuredly I *feel* His power, and to His will would bend my thought. Without His influence I would be nothing, and my understanding less than my body, that might remain."

Since Helon said nothing, Moses continued: "I see you are no common man but brave in your own spirit, yet if neither in the mountain nor in the silence nor in the deliverance from Egypt you felt the presence of Yahweh, if on our wanderings through the great solitude, in our times of despair and triumph, your blood has not burned, then there is likelihood that Kabaz speaks truth in naming you blasphemer. Speak and defend yourself."

"What I have seen with my eyes and heard with my ears, these things," answered Helon, "have given me understanding. I have perceived that one thing follows on another. The plagues in Egypt were no new thing. They had happened

many times before. They weakened the Egyptians and made possible our success. The sea was divided by the wind which blew from the east, and when we had passed over, the wind changed. Chance favoured us, though in the desert when we thirsted and many of our flocks died, we suffered the ill-fortune of travellers. I have tried to perceive things as they are, and looking on the desert, I have seen the desert, and on the sky, the sky."

"The word of God," said Moses, "is heard in the heart that is turned towards him. When you are alone in your solitude, have you heard nothing of his message?"

"When I have been alone, I have perceived that no other was there."

"But when was thy heart alone? Was not always He who was greater about thy heart?"

With a smile Helon said: "He did not speak nor move, though my heart waited and listened."

"And were you content?"

"I am content."

"Like an ass or a sheep?"

"Ask them, not me."

"Do you then think that I have dreamed of Yahweh's law?"

"It may be."

Moses paused, and in the silence men whispered to one another. "Not on the charge of Kabaz," Moses

said at length, "but on your own showing, as one grown proud and brave in the poverty of a little life does God condemn you. That you should live or die is of small importance, and though you are one, as I think, steadfast to keep the law, yet would your foward speech be a danger and the beginning of decay, for should they learn to trust in their minds alone, then would they be separated from the ways of life and die. . . . It is commanded that the blasphemer be taken without the camp and stoned with stones till he is dead."

"You have said that my life is a small thing," said Helon bitterly, "and thus do you weigh it lightly in your hands. There are many, though you know it not, who share my thought; many also that in ignorance and fear pretend to a worship they do not understand. If you were to exact from them the penalty, there would be few left for you to lead to the promised land."

Moses gave an abrupt gesture to the guards, and said: "The law shall be carried out as God has decreed."

VII

Until late evening, Moses sat giving justice and explaining the law. Beside the ten commandments and the greater things, he taught the smaller:

The slave should go free on the seventh year: his pledge should be restored to a poor man at sunset that he might sleep in his garment: no man should afflict the widow or the fatherless child: no man should lend money on usury to his brother: if a man smite out the eye or tooth of his servant, he should let him go free for his eye or his tooth's sake. He repeated the old law of the wandering Arabs of the north, by which Reuel had ruled; a life for a life, an eye for the loss of an eye, a tooth for the loss of a tooth. He bade them not yoke together an ox and an ass, nor mix different grains in the baking. The ox while treading the corn should not be muzzled: the stranger within the camp should be treated with kindness, for they, themselves had been strangers, captives in the land of Egypt.

Not till after sunset was his day's work finished, and as he came from the place of judgment he was weary. Jethro walked beside him and said: "Amongst our people in Midian, where seldom many are present at one place at the same time, it was well for our Father Reuel to sit alone and give justice between man and man. I, when I return, shall do the same; but for you, amongst this great multitude, it is not so good. For how many days have you thus decided the law?"

"For more than twenty, though we have rested on the sabbaths."

"No wonder you are tired. It is too much for any man. If you continue, you will wear yourself away, you and all the people who are with you."

"I am strong enough," said Moses. "I can do what is necessary."

"Even the strongest could not lift such a weight," answered Jethro. "You are not right to attempt it, for not only do you, yourself, suffer, but the people also."

"How is that?"

"When a man is tired he cannot nicely measure justice. The people press on you with many complaints, some petty, some grave. It were a wonder, did you not grow impatient. And listen," said Jethro, seeing that Moses was about to speak, "there is a danger for all men, and most for those who are the leaders of others."

"I should know that, indeed," said Moses with a note of bitterness in his voice. "Speak on, say what you have on your mind."

After a pause, Jethro said: "As your kinsman, I speak for your good and for the good of this people which you have led out of bondage. We serve Yahweh that we may do the tasks he has appointed. That were simple, were it not, that as we turn to the task, in the task, we forget his commanding. The task entrals us, or perhaps tires our strength too much; we are made weary. In youth we hear

the message of God: in manhood we strive to do his will, and it is well if we still hear his voice.

"I speak of simple things," said Jethro, looking at Moses, whose face seemed to have darkened with his thoughts. "In serving Yahweh, a man must know his strength, and what life is his to command, else looking on the task too earnestly, he may find it grown into his master."

Moses, upon whom the weariness of the day had weighed heavily, and whose brow had become clouded while Jethro spoke, paused now in his walk, and as he looked at his brother, he unexpectedly smiled. "It is well that you have come to the camp," he said in a gentle voice, "and as my brother speak my own thoughts to me. You are most welcome. I wish that you might always be with me. Speak, tell me what you think I should do."

"As leader of this people," said Jethro, "be as you have been, the one who can make plain the commands of Yahweh; teach them the laws and the way that they must walk, and the work that they must do. But do also this: choose out from the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating unjust gain, and make such men as these rulers and judges, some over large numbers, and some over small. If there is anything to be decided of great importance, such as the life and death of a man, that thing they shall bring to you, but small things

they shall judge themselves; so will it be easier for you, and they will divide the burden. Think of what I have said, refer it in your heart to God, and if he command you to do as I have advised, then you will not need to kill yourself with overwork."

Moses walked on for a while in silence. At length he said: "I will do as you have advised. It is my danger to be consumed and overwhelmed. I find the people stubborn, stiff-necked, obstinate. In the struggle, I grow base, and often I am weary. Oh, Jethro, my brother," he cried out, "when I think of those who openly or covertly oppose me, I myself grow unduly large. I would be humble, yet must I seek my own, if I would meet my enemies; and there are many who are turning against me. Sometimes I think my task is like a serpent in my hand, turning to bite me with poison drawn from my own strength."

Again he was silent, and Jethro did not question him. When he next spoke, he said: "I will do as you advise, and make captains, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, of fifties and of tens, and they shall judge the people at all seasons. I would not make myself greater than need be. . . . Yet if they are the people of the Lord God they must keep the law and walk in his commandments." Abruptly breaking from his thought, he asked: "Will you come with me on our journey?"

“Where are you going?”

“Northward.”

“Northward is the desert.”

“I go beyond it.”

“But where?”

“I have told you. To the land from whence this people came, the land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that Yahweh has promised we shall inherit.”

“A region of rumour only, where giants have built walled cities. Why not return to Rephidim? There is food and water enough. Or in Midian there is pasture.”

“They shall have more than pasture,” said Moses. “Come with us; then may you and your sons share it.”

“Too uncertain is the way. I will go back to Midian that I know. You are a wanderer, but I am a simple man, loving my own tent and the hills where my father dwelt.”

Moses said: “Doubtless you are right, though I am sorry you will not be with me. I shall miss your good counsel. And who knows,” he said, “whether it is not better for a man to worship Yahweh in the tent of his father, than to go . . .” he made a wide gesture with his arm to the northward, “I know not whither.”

CHAPTER VI

INTO THE WILDERNESS

I

“**T**O-DAY, Bezaleel, I shall place the stones of the law in the ark. That is a fit place where they may be carried on our march northward.”

Bezaleel, astonished at these words did not at once answer, he looked at Moses, for a moment met his deep penetrating glance, then looked away again and was silent.

Moses repeated: “The tablets of the law shall be carried in the ark from this time forth.”

“Master,” answered Bezaleel, “at your command I made the ark that it should contain the likeness of no thing on this earth. You yourself spoke of the emptiness in which should remain the invisible power. For Yahweh alone was it made; it was not designed to carry the heavy tables of stone.”

“What, is it not strong enough?” asked Moses, testily.

"It is strong enough, yet you said there was to be no image, nothing. In the building I thought of the greatness of God, too great to be shown . . . an empty space. Do you mean to change from that?"

Moses, who had walked some distance from the camp with Bezaleel, frowned and looked at the whiteness of the rocks shining in the sunlight; his eyes followed the broken undulations of the hills, and marked how, from the nearer slopes, the heat rose in shimmering waves. Gazing at the loneliness of the land, listening to the silence, his mood seemed to change, for when he spoke his tone was no longer abrupt, but gentle. He turned from the mountains and said: "You speak the half of my own thought. When I bade you make the ark, I said it should be empty, and so I would have it be. . . . So in future times it may be again. . . . But now listen, my friend, and understand. On all sides, as you have seen, I am beset with complaints. Since we left Egypt the people have never ceased complaining. They grumble at the hard fare that this region can provide, and speak regretfully of the dishes of melons, cucumbers and leeks, with which they once garnished their meat. When there are dangers and difficulties they cry out like slaves. At the crossing of the sea, at Marah, at Rephidim, there were many that abused me bitterly. Many are gluttonous and weak-spirited, but not all. What

think you these laggards know of Yahweh? I think they would serve any god that filled their bellies." He continued: "They must be governed by the law, *which they can understand*. They are blind eyes and open mouths, yet by the law shall they be taught the will of the Most High."

"In truth there is the law," said Bezaleel, "yet do not ——"

Moses cut him short. "It should be in their hearts; then no need for the writing. Yet there *is* need, more than enough that the word be plain. It has been written, cut in stone, that they may know it, and not fall into the abysses of Sheol, where Yahweh is not."

Bezaleel did not speak, but Moses could see by his look that he was not convinced. "I, too," he continued, after another pause, "I am turned aside by the thing that I have intended. Error is not to be avoided. The greater my understanding, the greater my desire for action. In the deed, I turn from God, and am other than myself. My spirit is darkened, yet I cannot go back. . . . My task is not with myself. . . . Therefore," he added firmly, "My command shall stand: the tablets shall be placed in the ark. . . . They shall rest in the Holy of Holies."

Bezaleel, listening, thought: "In a little while this great man will have forgotten that he is the

son of his mother, and husband of his wife or the father of his children. . . . Yet in *his* error would I rather be lost than live for my own sake."

After a long silence Moses said: "You of all men have the right to oppose me, and though you are right, and I wrong, yet obey. The law shall rest in the holy place. . . . Though they be not the children of Yahweh, they shall be the children of his law. . . ."

Bezaleel was going to speak, but seeing the expression on the face of Moses he waited.

"I would have friends who love me; my task leads I know not whither. . . . You have spoken truth: the ark should be empty. . . . I who commanded, gainsay it, bending before necessity."

II

From the plain before Sinai, the people in a long drawn line made their way over precipitous passes, down steep declines, and up, over the bare, rounded breasts of rust-coloured mountains. Moses, from the altitude of a pass, watched them snake-like before him. Up, over and down into the troughs of the waves of that bleak sea, they slowly seemed to crawl. The moving line was sometimes lost behind the cone-shaped contours of the hills, and appeared again as a broken band against the pale, roseate rocks.

On the road to Sinai, which Moses had traversed before, there had been landmarks; but these hills he had not trodden; all ways were unknown. Northward they must go, and often must choose blindly, following the winding valleys, clambering over the steep escarpments where these ran counter to their march. Wind-fretted and worn by the constant shifting of sand, the hills, like the humped, up-arched bodies of immense star-fish, lay heavily together, their rays interlaced in death, hardened, whitened by the downstreaming heat. Over and amongst them, the advancing line of the Israelites made their black track.

In the van went the priests, carrying the ark; and looking back, along the line, Moses saw still others behind, climbing the way of the pass. They went by in their tribes: first in each tribe the men, and amidst them the standard-bearer, then the women and children, some mounted on asses, some leading beasts of burden. The few oxen that had yet survived the rigours of the march from Egypt, came after; and last of all the flocks of sheep with their shepherds. They advanced very slowly, the sheep pausing to graze on the scant herbage as they went.

Thus day by day the long line had crept northward, winding between the hills. At night they had gathered in groups, but early in the mornings had set forward again, for they dared not stay long in that bare wilderness. They were growing tired and were

murmuring against him, but he could not let them rest, they must go farther, cross the deep valleys to the north and win to the high tableland beyond.

He mounted his ass and rode along the line to where the Levites, bearing the ark, were already beginning to descend a stony defile.

At noon, with the sun above their heads, they must descend yet lower between high rocks, where the heat was caught and held in narrow valleys, shut in and windless. Men and women wrapped closely their cloaks to shut the heat from their bodies, yet the sun seemed mercilessly to pierce through and burn their flesh. In that heat they gasped for breath, yet could find no relief, but must press on over the scorching rock.

A man had fallen in a fit. Moses dismounted his ass. "I will take him by the head, do you take him by the feet." But they answered: "We have burdens enough, and see, even now, he stiffens in death." And so it was, for the man had died of the sun's blaze, cast back from the white rock.

As the line advanced, others staggered and fell; few dared paused to drag them farther. Those that yet lived muttered in their fear, and pressed on to escape that valley of fire. Some said that the wrath of the gods of Egypt was pursuing them, and some that Yahweh was angry. What had they done to kindle his wrath?

Bezaleel, seeing Moses bending over the dead, said to him: "This should be called the Valley of Taberah, of burning, for it is as though a fire burnt amongst us. Do not wait here too long."

But Moses waited, cheering them on, heartening them till the last man and the last beast had passed out of that burning valley on to the cliffs above, where a cooler air fanned their faces. Then he rode forward along the slow-moving line, which marched for the most part in silence, though here and there men grumbled in low voices, and here and there a man or a woman would look up at him and smile.

When he came to the ark, he dismounted, and leading his beast, walked beside Aaron. He spoke of those who had died in the burning valley, whose bodies they had been forced to leave by the way.

"What caused that sudden burning heat?" asked Aaron.

"The stillness of the air. You have seen how in a pocket of sand where no air is moving, and where the sun strikes hot, a lizard will sometimes in mid course, curl up and die, or how some insect, hovering, will suddenly fall dead on an airless hollow: so it was in that valley."

"Did the people complain much?"

"They were too oppressed by heat, when it is cooler in the evening, they will find their tongues again. . . . I am hardened to their complaints,"

he added. "In time they, too, may grow as hard to the difficulties of this march."

"Those that do not die," said Aaron.

Moses, seeing the burns that the sun had made on his brother's forehead, seeing how he limped, thought of the easy life that Aaron had led as an artificer of metals in the shop of Azaru. He took him by the arm and said kindly: "We are a hardy people, like asses we can bear heavy burdens. If some die, others live, and in the end we will win through."

"I pray we may," said Aaron, "for there is little food we have with us. Our flocks and herds have dwindled to a tithe; and when they are killed there is little save skin and bone."

"They are thin, yet they crop well on the tarfa bushes which we pass."

Aaron did not answer, and after a while Moses said: "I have noticed on these bushes, on the underside of the leaves, and sometimes fallen on the ground beneath, little balls of gum, which when I tasted them were of a sweet, honeyish flavour; these, if plentiful enough, and the tarfa bushes seem to grow more numerous, might serve a man for food. In Midian I have heard that men have found such things in the wilderness, and have lived thereon."

Aaron stepped aside and plucked a branch. "I see none of these balls of gum you speak of."

"By this time the sun's heat has dried them up. They are there in the morning, but wither as the day advances."

"Thin food for a people to march on," said Aaron and shrugged his shoulders.

"Better than nothing, and there is little else when our own beasts have been eaten."

"What will you do to feed the people?"

Moses took his hand from his brother's arm and walked in silence.

"What will you do then to feed the people?" repeated Aaron.

"I pray to God." Then with a bridled fierceness in his voice: "He at whose prompting I raised my hand against the Egyptian—He gave me strength to kill. He sent me into the wilderness. He commanded that I should return to Egypt. He brought the plagues and the sickness. He brought the people to his mountain. He will not let them perish. . . . Oh, Aaron," he said, laying his hand again on his brother's arm and speaking in a milder voice: "Long and difficult may be the journey, and many our enemies, both within and without the camp. The way is harder than I had thought."

He loosened his grasp, and walked beside Aaron in silence, and Aaron, feeling the weight that was on his brother's spirit, did not trouble him with further questioning. At a few paces in front of

them, the Levites carried the ark up a winding way between cliffs, which the setting sun coloured a deep red, like burnished copper.

III

When they reached the tableland, those who were in the van found a great number of bushes growing there. "We will camp and rest," thought Moses, "for unless the people rest they will die. Such beasts as remain can crop these bushes; here there is shade and the high ground is open to the winds." He stood watching the far-flung line scattered over hills and valleys; it shortened as it advanced, and the people, gathering about the ark, set their tents in the order of their tribes. They came grumbling, foot-sore and hungry.

"What will we have to eat? No food fit for men," they said. "Better had we died in Egypt or been cut down by Pharaoh's charioteers at the crossing of the sea! What can you give us to eat? We die of hunger."

Moses said: "Have patience, wait till the morning. God will have compassion and provide food." He thought of the stories he had heard in Midian of how men had eaten of the little pellets that fell from the bushes.

So for that night he quieted them, and in the morning it was as he had hoped, for on the face

of the wilderness, on all sides under the bushes, lying on the ground, were small grains, small and white as hoar frost. And some of them were still clinging to the bushes, not yet having fallen.

The children of Israel looked about them in astonishment and asked one another: "What is it?" for they did not know what it was.

Moses said: "It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat. Gather, every man according to his need."

Then the people did as he had told them, and for a time their murmuring and discontent were at an end. They stayed at that place, gathering the manna before the heat of the sun was upon it, withering it to nothing. At first they were pleased with the food, liking its sweet, oily flavour. They told each other that it was the food Yahweh had sent: thus did he care for his chosen ones in the wilderness. Eating, they thought of the beneficence of their deity; the food had the very taste of holiness. Each morning they found it new-fallen; a miraculous gift from God, wholesome, palatable, different from anything they had known in Egypt. Moses did not need to extol its virtues; there were men of the people who stood forward among the tribes affirming that the spirit of Yahweh was upon them; Eldad and Medad proclaimed that it was by Him the manna had been sent. His was the living

spirit that would save them. They, too, they claimed, were prophets of the Lord, even though they were not amongst the seventy judges.

There were men in the camp, Joshua amongst them, who were jealous that any other save Moses should speak thus openly in the name of Yahweh. They came to him and said: "Master, forbid them, they are of the common folk and infringe your authority."

But Moses laughed and said: "Would to God that all the people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them all."

Resting on the upland plateau they ate the manna that each morning they found under the tarfa bushes; but as the days passed they began to tire of the sweet food. Abiram said to his brother Dathan: "I hate the sickly sweetness of this stuff; this is no man's food. Well enough for women and young children, perhaps, but not for men. If this is sent by Yahweh, as Moses, says, then he, like Moses, would have us grow soft and boneless like this sticky pap which melts when the sun shines."

Dathan said: "I am growing to hate the taste of it. What would I not give for meat again as we had in Egypt and bones to crack between my teeth." With a laugh he added: "Such food may be good enough for priests and holy men, but for my part I would have flesh where blood has

lately run. I dream of the smell of roasting fat and a flavouring of garlic."

"You do wrong," said Korah, "to say it is good enough for priests. Not good enough for me. When I was priest in Egypt we dined off better fare. The best is for the priest, for he will eat the portion set aside for the god himself. Ah, my children, we are fallen on bad times," he said, shrugging his huge shoulders, "when Yahweh, at the request of this Moses, sends us little gummy seeds to feed our manhood. Is it a wonder that we forget our strength? 'Tis a wonder we mildly suffer such a shuffling time-server as Aaron to be high-priest. . . . But that accepted, we may as well swallow this gummy food with the rest. It is a sickness in my mouth and stomach."

Thus they talked, and the talk spread amongst the people, and in truth they found a great sameness in the manna, so that although they were forced to eat it from hunger, they had little relish in the food that God had given.

What they had praised, they now loathed. They came to Moses, and said threateningly: "Give us flesh that we may eat. What good is this manna to us, that sickens our senses? Pray to God that He give us something better to our liking."

Moses, knowing their mutinous thoughts, and knowing that Korah, Abiram and Dathan would

not be backward to make occasion for revolt, went alone into the Tent of Meeting and there bent in supplication. God did not seem now so near as on Sinai. In his extremity he cried out: "Wherefore hast thou evil entreated thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layst the burden of this people on me? Have I conceived this people? Have I brought them forth, that thou shouldest say to me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father carrieth the sucking child? Whence should I find flesh? For they weep unto me, saying give us flesh that we may eat. I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, and let me not see my wretchedness."

Then as he waited in the silence, his thoughts turned bitterly, and his anger kindled. They should be punished, these people who cried against him, clamouring for meat where there was no meat, and scorning the miraculous gift of God. He would like to cram their mouths with meat till they were sick of it; not for a day or two days or ten days but for a month should they eat till the sight and the smell was loathsome to them. He prayed to Yahweh to give them such meat; and it seemed that the power that led him gave assurance that though there were no flocks or

herds to slaughter, no sea from which fish would be caught, yet should such meat as he desired punish their gluttony.

While he prayed, the curtains of the tent began to sway in the wind, and when he went out, he found that there had sprung up a south-east gale from the sea. He looked into it, towards whence it came, and saw in the distance, a black cloud which seemed to change constantly its shape and to come nearer. Sometimes it was like a ribbon drawn across the sky, sometimes it was gathered together, dense and black, like the crouched form of an animal, sometimes like the wing of a bird it was lifted, and then seemed poured out like water, spreading low over the ground.

As he watched this strange cloud, there came, with a whirr of wings, and borne swiftly on the wind, a sand-quail that fell close to his feet, and sat there eyeing him, resting from its flight. He called to the people: "God sends you meat; see the cloud of quails coming on the east wind from the sea."

The people rushed out of their tents, they shouted in their joy, and pointed to the dark cloud of birds. Some ran to gather sticks, and some to prepare cook-pots; they tumbled over each other in their haste, they laughed and shouted, the saliva gathered in their mouths in anticipation.

Within a short time there was spread over the camp a covering of whirring wings. For so far as a day's journey on either side did the quails extend. Men struck at them with their staves, beating them down, killing them; some of the birds, exhausted by their journey, crouched on the ground, and could be taken in the hand. All night the people feasted, and in the morning rose early that they might kill yet more, prepare them, split them open and dry them in the sun.

They spread the dead quails on stones around the camp, as they had seen the Egyptians do. Day after day they feasted, eating the succulent, highly flavoured meat; much to their liking after the sparse fare of the desert. There was no talk of going further, neither did they gather the manna, which fell each morning; they ate only of the flesh they craved.

So they feasted, till suddenly they sickened and the food was loathsome; the sight of the birds lying split on the stones was an offence in their eyes and the smell caused vomiting.

Aaron said that they had eaten too much of one kind of food, and Korah complained that, as the meat dried, some distemper was bred in it by the sun. For his part, he drank much water and rallied of the sickness, but many died in their vomiting. Not without satisfaction did Phinehas

look on their distress. "They lusted for flesh," he said, "and were not content with the manna that the Lord God sent. This is the reward of their lusting."

At that place many hundreds were buried, men, women and children together with the meat which was yet uneaten. They called the name of it Kibrothhattavah, the graves of lust.

When Moses gave the order that the Levites should take up the ark and continue the march northward, all were glad to leave. The standards bearers lifted their standards and the tribes rallied. One after another following the ark, they went on their journey.

IV

On the high land, the people gathered the manna that fell each night; after the orgy, they returned with resignation to the food God provided. Yet though they ate, they grumbled: "It is wholesome," they said, "but no food for men . . . better have remained in Egypt."

After many days they came to an enclosure where nomads were camped with their flocks. Here the standards were set and tents pitched. They could renew their flocks and barter fresh food with the Bedawyn in exchange for jewels and gold.

While they rested, Moses could not rest, for his mind went forward to meet the future, ere it had come. He listened to stories told by the Bedawyn of the long distance before them, and of the Amalekites that dwelt in the fertile valleys. Much time he spent alone in the Tent, praying for a sign.

Among these hills he did not hear the voice which had called on Sinai. He doubted. Had they taken the right path? Sometimes it seemed they were wandering at hazard amongst a maze of rocky ways which wore out flesh and spirit. Did this wilderness stretch indefinitely before them?

Alone in the tent, he bent to the earth in prayer. He could hear the distant murmur of the camp where the people were gossiping, bargaining, laughing. Each day he seemed to become more solitary and aloof. More distant too, from God.

He questioned whether his will was single for God's service. What were the human ties that bound him? His parents, whom he had scarcely known were dead; his brotherly friendship for Aaron was changed. Miriam, who had kindled him to action, had been like a shooting star in his heaven, had flashed a quick glory and gone out. What was she now? An old woman, jealous of her position, full of the gossip of the camp. In her eyes was an envy and grudging submission. His children? They had grown up while he was

in Egypt: he had hardly known them. Zipporah, a friend of Miriam and Aaron, distrusting Korah, hating Abiram, would involve him, woman-like, in petty rumours of the camp. The mute strength of her woman's will was between him and the Eternal. He brooded, thinking that to gain freedom for God he must put her from him.

Coming one day from the Tent, he met her and passed without speech, but when he had gone by, something in her mien made him pause. Why had she looked at him with such regret? Pity kindled the past . . . the touch of hands, the exchange of thought, the confidence, the need, the trend of youth . . . these very things separated him from God. With God no man might stand still. . . . Yahweh claimed all. No living thing should interpose.

He turned and called after her.

She came and stood before him. In her meek look he saw her dread; fearful of what he might say, she was arranging with slow nervousness the cloth which covered her head. He marked the lines about her eyes, that had come with age, and the thinness of her features; yet he saw her as she had been, when at the well, he had drawn water for her flocks. Her heart had not changed, the change had been in himself. Yet indeed she *was* changed and rightly, for God would have it so.

All things that lived must bear the burden of his hand. It weighed on her.

"Zipporah," he said, "I speak not of the past, for of that you know even better than myself. But from this time I will be alone. I leave you our tent, and will have a small covering set for me midway between the camp and the Tent of Meeting."

"But, Moses, why should you do that?"

He paused, finding the answer difficult. "I have a need. I think that God will have it so."

"How can such a thing be the will of God? What can you know of His will, when you speak such words?" Then coming a step closer to him, looking into his face, she said: "You are my husband who took me from my father's tent, you have no right to leave me."

"Our sons shall care for you, and I will see that you are well provided. All that I have is yours."

"But why, tell me. Why is it you would leave me?"

"God wills it," he said shortly.

"Not the will of God that man should live alone. Who will care for you?"

"I need no care."

"Every man needs some woman to care for him."

"That may be true of the time that has gone by," said Moses, "but not now."

"Have I offended?"

"Not in any way."

Zipporah drew back and thought for a while. "If you leave me without cause," she said at last, "all the camp will be talking. Their imaginings will find causes enough."

"I cannot help that."

"The women will scheme which of them shall be your wife."

"I want none of them."

"They will not believe it."

"They will waste their time and thought," he said, frowning.

"Oh, Moses, what is happening to you?" she cried out. "Why should you leave me without cause?" Then seeing Joshua, who happened to be passing near, she called to him, and weeping, complained: "Listen, Moses has said that he will leave me alone in our tent, and will live by himself. He has no reason for this action, and will not believe what evil it will bring. Tell him, Joshua, you who have always been the friend of both of us, tell him how, if he does this, all men will talk ill of him and me, and how the women will scheme which is to be his wife. They will give him no peace."

"What is the truth in this?" said Joshua.

"As she has said . . ." said Moses darkly. Then seeing that Joshua was silent in his astonish-

ment, he demanded with rising irritation, " Well, what say you? Must a man live with some woman in his tent, or will all the camp be talking? "

" There is truth in what she has said."

Because of the pain of his parting which he must hide, because his tenderness must be sacrificed, he broke out in anger: " Am I compelled then to be burdened with a wife? Ah, you are silent! Answer! Must I shut their gabbling mouths! Go, Joshua, to the Bedawyn, buy from them a slave girl. Bring her to my tent. She shall be nothing to me, yet in the eyes of the camp, she shall be my wife. Do as I bid you. Go! "

" They are but Cushites," said Joshua. " Ethiopians and black-skinned."

" No matter, bring her to my tent; so she is a woman, she will suffice. Begone, I am weary of this talking." So saying Moses strode away by himself, leaving Zipporah weeping.

v

When he had cooled of his anger, his words seemed to have come not from himself, they had no place in his heart; yet for this reason did they appear as a message from Yahweh, who thus painfully would loose him from the bonds of his affection. This Cushite girl should be his wife in the eyes of all

men; a slave that another had chosen at his command. Thus should he be free to follow only the thought kindled by God, when God should kindle it.

Women's tongues clacked at the gossip: A Cushite girl, a slave, whom it was said, Joshua had chosen from the Bedawyn. Some asked: "Why did he not choose for himself?" and there were some that laughed, saying he had a liking for younger meat than stuck to Zipporah's old bones.

Miriam, when she heard this talk denied it, yet went troubled to Zipporah to learn what truth, if any, there might be in such idle words.

Zipporah would say little; she wept, admitting that Moses would leave her.

"But what cause gave he?"

"He said it was his need, and the will of God."

Miriam chuckled in angry derision. "Is it to him alone to whom God speaks? He is too full of importance. But tell me: What of this Cushite girl? No truth in that?"

"Both truth and falsehood," said Zipporah bitterly. "In his anger, so sudden and fierce, he called to Joshua to go buy him a slave girl; and this because I had said that the women would contend who should be his wife. You know his wildness and his lack of heed. . . . Wife to him only in name, for he has grown indifferent to women, changed from the ways of youth."

Miriam laughed. "He goes beyond himself. Have you spoken to Aaron?"

"I have not. There is no help in words."

"Then I will see him, and we will speak again of this together anon."

Miriam found Aaron to be one in thought with herself. They went to seek Moses, where his new tent had been pitched.

After she had questioned and had admission of what Zipporah told, Miriam said: "Why hold from your wife? You alone of all men, and without cause."

"That is a thing between us," said Moses. "How can that concern you?"

"It concerns me," answered Miriam hotly, "that all the camp should be making talk of it. Some say you take a young woman in exchange for an old."

"They speak unworthily."

"You give occasion for their talk," said Aaron. "Why have you done this?"

Moses, looking at his brother, remembered the long journey from Egypt, and how Aaron had stood by him and helped him with a greater courage than he had ever hoped. Seeing the honest bewilderment that lay behind his question, he said meekly: "Because of my need."

"What do you mean?"

"I grow solitary," said Moses, "and it seems the will of God that I should be so. How can I tell the difficulties of this journey, unless you yourself know? God put this thought into my heart. Let the black woman cook my meat. Few of my words she can understand, and I but few of hers. It is better so. . . . My deed must come, not out of the past, entangled in a woman's love, but free out of the thought I know beyond question."

Aaron was silent, overborne by the passion of his brother's words, but Miriam cried out: "Does the Lord God speak only with you? I also am a prophetess, yet I have not denied my husband my body, neither has Aaron renounced his wife. Did our father Abraham put Sarah aside? and are you greater and wiser than he? Why should you think yourself different from Aaron and myself? It is your pride which makes you appear so."

Miriam paused, but Moses did not answer. She continued: "You it is that go alone into the Tent, seeking for the portent which shall guide us. Why should not I and Aaron come with you? On us also is the guiding power of Yahweh."

Then said Moses: "The Tent is open to all who dare enter. Whenever you desire it, come with me into the Tent. Let us go now together, and there withdrawn from the talk and rumour of

the camp, we may find balm for the bitterness that you feel."

VI

Moses stood a little forward from the centre of the Tent, facing the ark. Aaron was half a pace behind him on the right side, and Miriam on the left. For a long while they had remained thus in silence, waiting for some sign whether Moses was condemned in his pride. Because the silence made him restless, Aaron, after a while, moved forward nearer to the ark, and soon Miriam also came forward on her side; Moses alone remained standing without movement. Aaron bowed his head, looking on the ground, and with his thought would invoke the power of Yahweh to speak with him, but the more he tried to think of Yahweh the more he was aware of his brother. He raised his eyes and saw Moses gazing before him with head erect as though he saw the revelation of God's power that he himself had vainly invoked. Aaron looked at Miriam, and saw her with head bent and arms folded on her breast. He looked back again at Moses, and his thought, which had been dulled and oppressed since waiting in the Tent for the sign which had not come, now began to move more easily. These three, Moses, Miriam and

himself, had each in their separate way made possible the deliverance of the people from Egypt. To Miriam first had come the word, then to Moses, then to himself. The power remained with his brother. He remembered the passionate words that he had spoken, saying that his will and his deed must come not out of the past, but free out of the thought that he knew was beyond question. Did any other man speak like that? Could such words have come from himself or Miriam? Miriam and himself were entangled in the past, in the web of their fate. Moses alone seemed free. Who was he, Aaron, or who was Miriam to speak against a man like this? If Moses should see fit to live separate from his wife, ay, even if he should call to his tent some slave girl of the Bedawyn, who were they to judge his action?

Lowering his eyes again and looking on the ground, he felt he was answered. "If there is a prophet amongst us," he thought, "then truly this man is he; such a one that God will speak with mouth to mouth, manifestly; and not in dark speeches, but one who shall behold the very form of the Lord. Why was I not afraid to speak against this man, who, even more than he is my brother, is the servant of God?"

But Moses, gazing before him, was forgetful of both Aaron and Miriam.

Miriam, unaccustomed to enter the Tent, had looked with curious eyes at the long grey curtains, at the straight poles, and at the ark in which she knew were the stone tablets. Then, like her brother Aaron, she, too, had looked on the ground, and folding her arms had invoked a sign from Yahweh. She, too, was a prophetess, and, self-righteous against Moses, she hardened her heart. For a time her mind had remained blank and hard, but after a while her heart began to beat faster. She looked at Moses who seemed to be gazing into some invisible, distant scene, and at Aaron who was looking at Moses, and it seemed to her in the silence of the Tent, that the presence of Yahweh was there stirring. Faster beat her heart, and she began to tremble. The fountain of her life seemed troubled at its source; an unknown power was rising out of the depth, shaking her limbs, drawing the blood back into her heart. Her words of reproach were forgotten, and looking at Moses, she saw that he was greater than she. While she was shaken by the power, he stood firm, unmoved; he looked into the emptiness and saw what her eyes could not. And as she gazed at him, the power which at first had seemed to be rising within her to shake and palsy her life, now seemed to grow vast and to fill the Tent, and be part of that influence which Moses could sustain with bright,

unflinching gaze. Upon her it seemed to press, making her breath come shallow and quick. She was afraid, and, with a sudden cry, ran to the entrance, caught the curtain and pulled it aside, dragged upon it, supporting herself, and breathed eagerly of the outer air.

When Moses and Aaron came to her help they saw that she was as white as any leper.

Her malady did not at once depart, nor did her blood come back to her cheeks, nor could she speak. Moses and Aaron went with her to her tent, and Aaron, remembering the thought that had come to him in the silence, said: "We have done foolishly, in speaking against you, but now, for her sake, who, when you were a child, followed to see what would become of you, pray to the Lord that she does not remain as one dead."

After a little time, while Moses prayed, the blood returned to Miriam's cheeks, and she was as she had been before. Yet because of her illness and its resemblance to leprosy, the elders advised that she should live outside the camp for seven days, according to the law on those cleansed of impurity. After that time, the people moved forward from the great enclosure where they had met with the Bedawyn, and pitched their tents in the wilderness of Paran.

CHAPTER VII

THE ARROWS OF THE ALMIGHTY

I

AFTER travelling many days, often turned back by unscalable cliffs, with rearward marches and detours, they came at length to the Bedawyn enclosures called Kadesh. Here they pitched tents, and, looking northward, could see how the land sloped toward greener valleys. Small springs of sweet water came bubbling between rocks, and with refreshing sound gushed downward, joining together and forming streams, which ran gurgling, edged with bright plants, to be lost among the vegetation they gendered.

The light breeze, bearing the scent of young grass and upland flowers, was like hope in their hearts, a caress or a fond thought. Tears came to their eyes as with wonder they looked in each others' faces, and then back again toward the valleys, stretching into the blue haze of distance. That their long march, like their servitude, should

have an end, seemed, now that their eyes saw and their nostrils inhaled the sweet promise, too wonderful to be true. In whispers they spoke to one another: "There lies the land we are seeking: for this have we come out of Egypt. See how the morning sun lies gold and pale green on the young grass." "Listen to the sound of water running among the stones; the birds sing no sweeter. Let us go down; it will be ours for the taking, for God has promised." Some of the older men and women, falling on their knees, stretched their arms towards that unknown land, and called down blessings on the lost heritage of their fathers. The young men laughed and looked shyly at one another. "Let us press forward and have done with desert wandering."

Moses, moving to and fro among his people, sharing their wonder and their joy, felt his heart, in the cool clearness of that dawn, burn with the same rapture as on Sinai. He chose of the strongest men of each tribe for the advance guard, and bade the Levites be ready, ere the sun was at noon, to take up the ark.

Yet some hesitated and said: "What of the tribes who there inhabit? Doubtless they are warlike and very numerous. And as this land is the most beautiful we have seen it is likely to be the most dangerous. We have heard of the

Anakim, giants begotten by the sons of God on the daughters of men? These giants sharing the qualities of men and of eternal spirits, may lie in wait to destroy us. Better not to move forward too hastily. Let us be wary."

Those who had not thought of danger now also hesitated, and again as they looked with longing eyes on the land, it seemed that great danger might lurk in such great beauty. Aaron, who had been among those who had knelt and wept, stretching their arms, grew thoughtful. "Truly we had best be cautious," he said. "Amongst that dense vegetation, in those winding defiles there may well be ambush set. Already on the distant hills we have seen men against the sky-line. In all likelihood they are Amalekites and no friendly Bedawyn as at Hazeroth."

Korah, who had long been jealous of Aaron, envying him the office of High Priest, spoke contrary to his advice—and this fitted well with his own nature that would fain taste again the fruits of cultivation. "Better march forward, we have had enough of desert fare. If God has promised us the land, as you have said, surely the dangers of open country are not greater than those we have survived." In this counsel Dathan and Abiram gave their support. "So there be better food in the land of promise, let us go forward; we follow Korah in his advice."

Thus they debated the wisdom of the forward march. And since they could come to no sure decision, being divided in opinion, Joshua said: "Were it not better to send men to spy out the land, and bring back report of what it is like and of the people who dwell therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; whether they dwell in camps or in cities. Let one of the chief men of each tribe be sent and go through all the land, the length and breadth of it, and as they go, take note of the fertility of the soil, of the springs of water, of the wood and the pasturage, of the places where we may camp and the best ways of advance. Let them be of good courage and bring back the fruit of the land that we may see it and know."

"That were a perilous task," said Aaron. "What if they should fall into the hands of the enemy?"

"They take their lives in their hands as when in battle," answered Joshua. "I myself will be one, and choose Caleb my friend to come with me; as for others, they will not be backward."

To the elders and Moses this course seemed to combine both daring and caution. Out of each tribe a man was chosen, and in the night they set forth to spy out the land.

Then patiently with high expectation, the people waited. Yet anxiety daily grew in the camp, for

on the neighbouring hillsides they could see the increasing forces of the Amalekites, who, hostile to the approach of this multitude of strangers, were gathering their kinsmen from the scattered tribes of the upland country. Each day Moses went out from the camp on to a hill and looked on the green fertility of the land, believing that in a little while they would go forward and take possession. Each day he looked on the surrounding hills, and saw gathering there, first in small groups, but ever more numerously, the tribes of Amalek. It may be well to wait, he thought, but no man should wait too long, or the very danger he would guard against will gather superior strength. He ordered that pickets should be set far out from the camp, and each night scouts were sent to gather news of the movements of the enemy.

So with hope waning a little, and anxiety waxing in their hearts, they waited the return of the spies.

The first to return were Shaphat and Igäl bearing between them on a pole the branches of a single vine. The pole bent under the load. The people clustered round them eager for their report. "It is a marvellous fine land doubtless, as you may see from the yield of a single plant. A fine land for such as possess it; but these did not seem to us as the children of men. They are far mightier than we; they are the Nephilim, the sons of Anak:

born of women, maybe, but gendered surely by the sons of God. We went as far as their cities of Rehob and Hebron, and these are strong cities with high walls: we could not storm them. If we went down into the valleys they would doubtless destroy us."

While the people, downcast at this news, were questioning and reporting to one another what Shaphat and Igal had said, there came into the camp, tired and footsore from their long journey, Gaddi, Gaddiel and Palti. Flinging themselves down and asking for water, they told in broken snatches, as they lay exhausted, how they had travelled far to the northward, even to Hamath. The land was a rich land, flowing with oil and milk and honey, but the people were great and warlike. The cities were walled with strong stakes. No question: the Israelites could not prevail against them.

At this report the murmuring throughout the camp grew to a wailing. With longing eyes they looked on the rich fruits, which their hearts feared to claim. "Would to God we had died in Egypt," said some, "or had died in the wilderness. What can we do now? The wilderness is behind us, and before us are powers that we dare not face. Why did we listen to Moses? Happier were we in our servitude."

Even while they talked together in a great hubbub, again questioning the spies, and letting the fear in their hearts magnify the dangers of which they heard, there came in Ammiel and Geuel and Nahbi and Sethur. Their clothes were in rags on their backs, torn by the dogs that had set on them. They were lame and wounded, they came supporting each other and uttering groans. The people closed round them, and already, before they had spoken, guessed from their plight their misadventures. They brought them goats' milk for their refreshment, and mats to sit on. When they had eaten and drunk and were a little rested, the spies said: "Of a truth we have seen enough. We have been to the east and the west: we have seen the cities of the Hittites, of the Jebusites and the Amorites that live in the mountains, and the Canaanites by the sea and along the side of Jordan. We have found little food and a fierce people. Look! only pomegranates and a few figs which we have brought away in our sleeves. It is a hungry land which eateth up its inhabitants. Yet the men we saw were men of great stature who used us cruelly, beating us and setting their dogs on us. They were giants compared to us, and we to them seemed of no more account than grasshoppers."

Then the children of Israel began to tear their garments and put dust on their heads. "Why

has Moses brought us to this place?" they cried again. "Is the land then only a bitterness and an illusion? Have we marched all this way to gather a few pomegranates and figs? Better far to have died in captivity. Let us return. Let us return. Choose we now another leader and return to Egypt.

While they were crying out in their disappointment, and putting dust on their heads and tearing their garments; while the outcry against Moses was at its height, Joshua and Caleb entered the camp. They came bearing great baskets of fruit, and with them skins of goats' milk and new baked loaves. Finding all in confusion, they elbowed their way to where Moses stood near the Tent of Meeting, listening in angry silence to the outcry. They ordered those near them to bend their backs, and, mounting upon their shoulders, cried: "Listen you who are faint-hearted: We also have been through the length and the breadth of the land. We entered warily. It is all that we have believed. We have seen the people and their cities; there is no need for fear. Do not now, at the last, rebel against the Lord God who has brought you thus far. Go forward in confidence, and we will conquer. The inhabitants of yonder rich lands are grown lax; they no longer shut the gates of their cities at night. Their hearts are soft and their bodies are fat. They will be as bread for our eating; their

cities will fall before our attack. Their strength will be like the mirage which vanishes as we approach. The Lord will be with us; fear them not."

Some of the crowd had paused to listen, but with obstinate doubt questioned: "What of the Amalekites who gather against us to bar our way?"

"Why I have returned later than the others," answered Joshua, "is because I have been spying on their strength. Their numbers are not yet full; others come later from distant hillsides. We should attack before their coming. As yet we have the greater strength: half are but yet arrived. These we can devour with our onslaught, those that come later will be food for our swords. Have you forgotten how before Rephidim we scattered Amalek? We have beaten them once, we will beat them again."

But only a few were listening to Joshua. For the most part they made complaint amongst themselves; some were talking of a new leader who should lead them back to Egypt, some were looking anxiously to their possessions, others arguing with the women, and some few, like Korah, thinking how they could use this weakening in the authority of Moses to their best advantage.

Moses, viewing the swaying, gesticulating, shouting and disorganised mob, was silent. Was this to be the end of their difficult march? Was it

for this they had come out of Egypt: to see the land of promise, and to draw back? Cowards and unworthy, they make bitter my task.

Joshua, who stood beside him, said: "While in this mood, I can do nothing with them. Though every moment is of value, and we should attack Amalek at once; they will not listen to me; they have forgotten that they are soldiers and men."

"I go into the Tent. There I shall be out of sight of their disgrace. Do you follow if you will."

II

In the tabernacle, although Moses did not see them, he was not shut off from the babel of voices, yet, despite the cavilling outside, there was behind the curtains a feeling of stillness. The air was calm and heavy with the scent of the raw wool and hair of which the hangings were made; there was only dim light, and round the ark and in the curtains behind it, dark shadows.

At first, with a feeling of relief, Moses stepped into the central space. His loneliness came with overpowering strength, flattening his spirit to the earth; his labour on these people seemed lost. Closing his eyes in anguish, raising his clenched hands before him, a thought, like a hot wire in his brain, questioned: "Will they for ever despise the

way of fulfilment? Must I not of necessity abandon them, if they thus abandon me?" Then letting his hands fall at his sides, gazing at the ark, he thought: "If I leave them to their confusion, they perish. . . . And were it possible for my thought to live in myself alone and find the vision? Nay, *that* by which I live is in them. . . . The fire that I have kindled has led them through the wilderness; my God has become their God."

Standing there after long silence in the half darkness, his thought found words: "Let the power of the Lord be great and slow to anger, rich in mercy. Pardon again, as even until now."

Then out of the shadow: "As I live, and as the earth shall be filled with my glory, they who have seen my signs and have doubted shall not enter into my promise. To-morrow turn back into the wilderness; these people are not fit for the land which I have sworn to give; only their children shall receive what they have rejected."

At evening Moses came from the sanctuary and went to his own tent. To Joshua he gave the order that in the morning the camp should be struck.

When the people heard that they were to turn again into the wilderness, they made a great outcry, for whatever was commanded was now distasteful to them. "We have had enough of the wilderness," they cried.

Then Dathan calling together those of the elders who were most dissatisfied, said: "Better stake all on the hazard and fight with Amalek. Go get your weapons and make ready."

Encouraged by Korah and Abiram, and forgetting their allegiance, a large part of the fighting men chose Dathan as leader, and they marched out against the Amalekites.

Moses remained in the camp together with the ark and those who foresaw disaster from the twis mindedness that at one hour would say "nay" and at another "yea."

The men of Amalek waited till the Israelites had come up on to the high land near to the mountain where their strength was gathered. At first they gave ground, to tempt them further; and Dathan, believing victory to be within his grasp, urged his men forward. But when they were far from help, great numbers of the enemy, concealed in the ravines, beset them on all sides.

The issue was not long in doubt, and soon there was confusion among the Israelites. Many were killed, and all might have perished had not Joshua and Phinehas with the Levite guard been in readiness to protect the camp. Dathan and his brother Abiram were amongst those who escaped. They came back with diminished pride, but later, at a hint from Korah, they found crooked

words by which to lay the blame of their defeat on Moses.

Darkness brought a close to the battle. At dawn, abandoning their wounded and dead, the Children of Israel marched eastward along the southern border of the land of Edom.

III

When Moses led the people into the wilderness after the defeat, he knew not which way to go. No longer were they journeying towards a goal, but had taken a path at hazard to escape pursuit. By evening the silence of the desert closed again around them, broken only by the whistling cries of the kites, high over head.

That night they camped in the wilderness of Zin, and after Joshua had seen to the outposts, he came to take counsel with his leader.

Entering his tent, he found Moses taciturn and gloomy. He waited for him to speak.

Raising his massive head and looking at Joshua with a frown, he said:

“I will lead this people through the desert, Joshua, no matter where, so long as the way is hard and bitter; I will lead them, though they drop by the way in scores; till they have learnt to obey, till they have learnt the meaning of a command.

. . . How should this rabble enter a rich land guarded by strong men . . . ? They have become like a sickness to me. Have you heard how they grumble, putting the blame on my shoulders ? They cast glances as though they would stone me. . . . Yet because of their ignorance, because they hold back when they should attack, and attack when they should stay their hand, they shall learn that not for such as them is the land, but instead wandering and death in the stony wilderness."

"It is true they need hardening," said Joshua. "No question yet of going northward, or of even returning to Kadesh, where there is good water and food enough."

"Men do not grow valiant on food and water. The desert shall feed them."

"Are we to wander like Bedawyns ? "

"Till they gain strength to do otherwise."

Joshua said quickly: "I did not know your anger was so deep."

"It is not anger. My understanding has been awakened."

After a silence Joshua came a step nearer and said: "Then doubtless you will have seen that there are too many counsels in the camp. Our weakness within makes our enemies the greater. Yet," he added, grimly, "long marches and frequent skirmishes will keep the edge of war

on the people, and those that are not needed will fall off."

" Speak your mind more clearly."

" Korah and his following cannot be tolerated much longer."

For a moment a flash of doubt seemed to pass over his face, and Moses said: " What have you against him? He is always circumspect."

" Circumspect enough," said Joshua, " but you must have seen, that, though himself a man of strength and character, he weakens the people: his very aspect, so large and well-being, his mocking laugh . . . to them he appears what they would be themselves; he seems easy and tolerant, friendly and kind to their infirmities, yet always mocking at great deeds, ready, like themselves, to avoid what demands endurance; yet a great man, withal; once a friend of Pharaoh and a prince in Egypt. He weakens authority; without him Dathan would not have dared to lead the fighting men in mutiny."

Moses was silent. His face was like a mask and gave no sign.

Joshua, looking intently at him, and speaking in a low voice, said: " It would be well if on a dark night Korah came by a quick death."

Moses frowned. " Not by your word or mine shall he die. As you have said, he is a man not to be despised; he is as much one of the people

as you or I or Aaron. His fate is with the nation, though I feel his enmity, yet must we suffer him."

"If we endure too many of his kind," said Joshua dryly, "we shall lack strength for attacking."

Again Moses paused in thought, he asked: "How does he bear himself towards this retreat?"

"He says there is no need, that we can march forward through Edom and occupy the land."

Moses smiled. "Yet you say he weakens our power for attack."

"That is not strength, merely a shrewdness that knows what random thought will be acceptable."

Moses nodded in acquiescence. "On the long marches through the wilderness," he said significantly, "such men will fall away or find their proper station. For a long time I have known that Korah uses his influence against me; I would not willingly prevent him. He tests our strength; if his way is nearer to the way of God than what is revealed to me, he will prevail; but if my way is nearer, then he will perish. . . . You are right in supposing him to be my enemy," Moses added. "In my own heart also there lives one like Korah, and I am often tempted to find an easy path to the people through such an one. . . . The order for the morrow," he said in a changed voice, "is to march south-east towards the Red Sea. We will try out these mur-

murers on long marches that will harden their minds and sinews. . . .

IV

Throughout the camp rebellion grew. "Why should we be forced to wander at hazard through the wilderness at the will of this madman?" men asked one another. "What is he seeking for? Wrapt in his own thought, he walks apart. He does not feel the hardships that press on us. He speaks of God and looks beyond the limit of our lives. With bitter marches he wears our flesh to the bone, and when we fall and die in this flint-strewn wilderness, our bodies are left for kites to peck at. Whither are we going with our backs turned to the land of promise and the sea before us?" Thus they spoke to one another, and Moses knowing their thought grew harsh towards them.

There was a woman of the tribe of Judah who was a widow and poor in possessions. She had but one ewe-lamb whose dam had died of the hardship of the march. She fed it from her bread and gave it to drink from her own cup. When she sheared the wool from her lamb, Aaron came to her and said: "The first of the shearing of the flock shall be given, therefore I take the fleece of your lamb."

The woman wept and complained, and going to Korah, she said: "O my Lord, you who understand the needs and sufferings of the people, I am a poor woman, all that I possess is one ewe-lamb. When I sheared its wool that I might make clothes for myself, for you see how ragged and ill-clothed I am, Aaron the High Priest, came and took the fleece from me."

Korah said: "That is like Aaron, a mean fellow, a stickler for rights and ceremonies. Wait here, I will do what I can for you."

He went to Moses and said: "I would not trouble you, who, no doubt, are concerned with weightier matters, as perchance which waterless ravine we shall next wander through, but a poor woman has made complaint to me. She has but one lamb, and when she sheared it, Aaron came and claimed the fleece. May it not be returned to her?"

Then Moses, hearing in the voice of Korah a jibe against the wanderings that it now seemed to him God had commanded, and finding in it also a resemblance to a voice in his own heart that would speak of compassion towards the weak, said: "It is written in the law: the first of the shearing shall be given to God."

Korah looked at him through half-closed eyes, smiled, and went back to tell the people what Moses had said.

Then as the months passed the ewe bore a lamb, and Aaron came and took it away. Again the woman went to Korah weeping. Again he said he would intercede with Moses. And Moses again recognising the voice that he intended to quell in his own heart, said: "The first born male of thy cattle and sheep shall be dedicated to the Lord thy God. What Aaron has done, he has done in accordance with the law, by which the people must live." This time Korah shrugged his shoulders. He looked heavily at Moses and went away without speaking.

"You had better kill your ewe," he said to the woman, "that is the only way, under these our masters, that you may come by any benefit."

Then the woman, following the advice of Korah, killed the ewe. Aaron as soon as he had heard of it came and claimed the flesh, for he said: "All that is dedicated shall belong to the priest."

The woman went to Korah crying: "He has taken from me all that I have. Is there no recompense against the cruelty of the law?"

Korah told her to make her wrongs known throughout the camp, and a third time he went to Moses, and said: "See what a great hardship is put on this poor woman: first they have taken her wool, then the first-born, and now the ewe itself."

Then Moses, knowing that the whole camp was talking of the affair, and that men were taking sides and quarreling, and that Korah, speaking for the woman, was speaking against the authority of Aaron, and knowing, most of all, that the voice that accused was not only Korah's, but a voice within himself, which must be silenced, if he would serve God faithfully in the wilderness, said: "Can you not understand that God claims everything: everything must be given in his service."

Korah nodded his head slowly. "I will go and tell that to the people," he said, and in his eye was a look of triumph and a gleam of inward and ironic laughter.

v

At night, Moses sitting alone in his tent, gazed through the lifted flap over the wilderness.

"Even now he stirs them against me, and there are many to listen. Not yet will I lift my hand; let him do what is in his power. Neither length of march nor hardship will alter; no plague nor drought will shatter him; he is hardy in mind and sinew as myself. In myself he lives, and for that must die, and all those who cleave to him.

"Our march is marked by the graves we leave behind, by the bones of those we have not time

to bury. Now he goes to stir them against me in the night under the cold moonlight, that bleaches the wilderness and makes black the shadows; he moves them contrary to the will that I must follow. He points already to their death. No longer may his creeping mutiny eat at my strength.

“For forty years shall they wander, watching the moon wax till the full sphere makes the earth white as their strewed bones, watching it wane until the empty sky is darkened and without a gleam. In the wilderness they shall grow beyond Korah and his thought. How else can the new generation be born, if the wisdom, brought out of Egypt, does not perish? They shall march in mazes and in circles until they learn that no weak thought, no craving shall shield them from the law, which in the mind flashes like a sword.

“Sufficient cause have we to turn back amongst these rugged hills where there is no comfort. I, too, like the people, have been slow to learn; even now would I avoid this conflict; I would rather the slow hand of time should take him than the violent act.”

For a while his thought was still, and his eyes rested vacantly on the black and white of the moonlit desert. Again they kindled.

Here Yahweh is God indeed. Nearer has he been to me here than in Egypt. . . . In the bush which burned and was not changed, he spoke his

name. . . . On Sinai sounded the ten words of his mouth. . . . In the cleft of the rock, where I had crouched in fear of his glory, he revealed his terror; there I beheld the power of Leviathan and of Behemoth: *in them* the strength of the Almighty. . . . At Kadesh he lifted me up with hope when I looked on the land of his promise. Their hearts failed and his wrath drove them back to the wilderness again. . . . Shall I falter? His will is upon me, like an iron hand.

“Aaron knows it not, and Joshua knows it not, yet I know that between those who stand with me and those who stand with Korah, there can be no peace. The men who march further shall be fewer than the men who came hither.”

VI

From the tent of Moses, Korah went to Abiram and to Dathan. He bade them go through the camp and call the leaders of the tribes. The time was ripe to throw off the rule of Moses and seek their own deliverance.

A great crowd mustered in the open space before his tent, and Korah in the full height and breadth of his bulk, stood in the moonlight, wrapped round in his cloak. With his slow, emphatic voice he began: “I have come from the tent of Moses and

these are the words he bade me tell you: 'Everything must be given to God: a man shall keep nothing for himself.' " They answered: " How then are we to live ? " He resumed: " Go back over our journey. Think of the months that have passed in aimless wanderings and of the graves that we have left. Does any man know whither we are bound or where to-morrow's march will take us ? Are we to wander at random till we all drop dead ? "

A voice called out of the crowd. " He has no pity for the old, the halt or the maimed."

" Those who would still call themselves men," Korah continued, " must find this desert worse than Egypt. There, though we laboured, we died in our own huts ; we were enslaved, but we saw the work of our hands. Here, wandering at random in the wilderness, we are oppressed for no purpose. The law crushes our life; it is a tyranny taking from the poor even their small belongings. From the widow's one ewe, when she shears, the fleece is taken; when it lambs, the lamb is taken; and when it is killed the flesh is taken and given to the priests. How are we better than slaves ? "

" We are worse enslaved than in Egypt," cried Dathan. " This law that Moses has set up is not the law of God. He has gone mad in the wilderness."

Abiram laughed and said: " Not so mad but that he can take the best for himself and be a law

to his own liking. He is a man who seldom asks counsel, going his own way. In office he will have those who are subservient. Aaron, his brother, is High Priest. Phinehas, the leader of the guard, his nephew, and Miriam who claims to be chief amongst the women, his sister. He sees to it that these friends of his do not die by the way, but only the poor and those far from his regard."

"That is true," cried voices in the crowd. "On us the law falls most heavily."

The slow voice of Korah was again raised above the mutterings. "Who is Aaron that he should be High Priest? Is he a man of any excellence? Or does he live only in the shadow of Moses? Faltering and cowardly, he cringes like some dog that waits upon his master's nod." Still speaking slowly and only raising his voice a little, he continued: "He is not worthy to be High Priest. Choose another in his place: a man who will not oppress the poor, one who sees that human needs must take first place of the law, one who is not afraid to stand his ground and look Moses in the face."

"Ay, we will choose," cried a voice. "Let Korah be High Priest." And from all the crowd came the cry: "Let Korah be High Priest."

Korah lifted his hand for silence. "Do not choose hastily. Consider well, for if ye choose me,

then must you break from the rule of Moses. His law cannot be my law."

"We have had enough of his law," they shouted. "What do we want of it? It brings only long marches, plague and death, and little food."

"Consider well. . . . If with him you were ever to enter the promised land, you would still perish. Of what use are grapes and oil and milk and honey if all must be given to God? Did any god in Egypt make such demands? The gods in Egypt you could see; they had forms that could be worshipped; but Moses has said: Ye shall make no images. If we deny the images we deny the gods; for it is impossible for man to worship save he worship an image." He repeated slowly: "Without images of the forms that are eternal, there will grow a godless race, taking delight in the contrivances of their hands, seeking without understanding, to find in these, the form of the God that would fain come to life. Yahweh, if he would live in your hearts must have an image, or he would create one, himself, out of the void."

"Make for us an image of Yahweh," they cried, "that we may see and believe."

"Have you not had enough of your second slavery?" cried Abiram.

"Ay, we have had enough, more than enough. Lead us to the promised land."

"I would for their own sakes that all would follow me," said Korah, "but Moses, who would be a king over you, holds many deluded. These tarry for their own destruction, their bones will whiten the wilderness. But you who understand that a man's life is for green valleys, meadows by the riverside, for corn-fields and the treading of grapes, follow me; I will lead you to Canaan."

"We will follow! We will follow!" they cried. "Korah shall be our High Priest. The widow shall keep her ewe, and its fleece shall warm her bed."

"No time now for talking," shouted Dathan. "Be swift for action. . . . To your tents . . . get yourselves arms. Make ready your wives and your children; ere the dawn comes we will set out for Canaan. Have no fear. . . . We strike north for Edom, and there we shall find the great high-way of the Bedawyn. Along this track in easy marches, watering our flocks at the wells that are already made, we shall come in a few days to Canaan."

The people dispersed, talking eagerly, and in a short while the sound of mallets could be heard striking at the pegs that held the curtains of the tents. There was the bleating of flocks disturbed from their rest, the sharp calling of women's voices and the cries of children.

VII

As he had left him, with one arm raised, holding the central upright of his tent, rigid against it, so Joshua found Moses when he returned an hour before dawn.

“Stamp out that torch; it dazzles my sight.”

In the darkness, Joshua could just perceive a blacker mass against the tent pole, and feeling the weight of the long silence, shut within that tent, which had endured the night, he was awed.

“Have you not heard the turmoil and the movement?” he questioned. “Dathan, Abiram and Korah have stirred the people to mutiny. They and their followers are making ready to go northward. I had thought to have word from you. I waited thinking you would come . . . but now. . . .”

“Why should I speak before the time is ready?”

“At dawn they will leave the camp.”

“By their own act they separate themselves from us. . . . My power cannot alter their hearts.” After a silence he said: “Yet I would gladly do so and avoid the conflict where their children also shall perish; for the children of the ignorant may in time grow wise. . . . How many would go?”

“Almost a third of our number.”

"Too many to be lost from our strength. . . . Go, send a messenger to Korah and Abiram and Dathan and bid them come here to my tent. Even at the last it may be possible to avert their deaths."

"Better, my master, give me the word to fall on them ere they depart. I have the guard ready to do my will. Such men are better dead. They are violent, and full of their conceit."

"Do as I say, bid them come to my tent."

When Joshua had gone, Moses remained listening to the sounds of the people getting ready to depart.

The east was flushed with the light of the sun as yet hidden behind the hills when Joshua returned. "They say they will not come," he reported.

"Then let them depart and lead their following to destruction," Moses said slowly. "Them and their wives and their children. I have tried to save them and they will not be saved. Let them be destroyed," he said, with a sudden passion, taking a step towards Joshua and clenching his hands. "When they are quit of the camp, fall on them with all your strength; put every man, woman and child to the edge of the sword; let not one survive."

Joshua, surprised at this sudden violence, said after a pause: "The example of their deaths will strengthen the others."

With a sadness as deep and sudden as his anger, Moses said: "Do they indeed need the sight o

blood to be strengthened in allegiance? Is there not any man who lives what he believes? You, Joshua, you who are the sword in my hand to do the deed, tell me while we wait for the day, what think you of the Lord Yahweh to whom we sacrifice a third of this people? Is he a god as the gods of Egypt to be satisfied with blood offering?"

"He is the Lord God," said Joshua, looking for a moment into the dark eyes of Moses, then quickly lowering his glance.

As though the answer were not sufficient, Moses remained silent, and at length, as though his thought had travelled a long distance, he said: "Our father Abraham came easily from Canaan to Egypt. Joseph sold as a slave to merchants, did not find the journey hard. . . . *But to go back, to go back*, that is more difficult. From Egypt to Canaan the way is not lightly to be found. . . . In Egypt it was given to any man to live his life after such fashion as Korah would live; but to regain again what is lost! The people speak truth when they cry against me and say that it were easier to have stayed in Egypt. But you, Joshua, who have been into the promised land and have seen and tasted, you know that what we have lost is bathed in wonder. I have not seen with my eyes as you have, yet I know. And now I wait until the time of wandering is accomplished. . . . I wait."

After a pause he continued: "Sometimes my silence grows too heavy for me; you are my friend, faithful in all things, listen and bear with me: I have looked into my heart, and out of my heart, like a column of smoke, like a pillar of fire, has come a vision of the world, and of more than the world: the moon, tracing its sphere, and greater than the moon the sun, and further than the sun all the stars of the firmament. This greatness out of my heart, which grows and looms beyond me, has cast a shadow across the wilderness, which shadow is the Law of Yahweh; and only in the track of that shadow is it permitted to return from Egypt to Canaan. No other way is possible. . . . These men must die to-day. . . . In Egypt Korah might have been my friend, but not in Canaan. . . ."

Then, changing his tone from that of meditation to command: "Look, the sun is risen. See that your men are ready and when the followers of Korah are separated from the camp, go after, and put them to the edge of the sword."

VIII

As the sun rose steeply towards its zenith, the followers of Korah marched northward through the wilderness.

"Though we are still in the desert," said Korah to his companions, "with many long marches before us, we are free from the tyranny of the law. I can almost feel a man again."

"They are singing as they march," said Dathan. "I have not heard them sing for a long time. That is a good sign."

"They are singing as they sang in Egypt," said Abiram, "though then our burdens did not press so heavily as the sight of these bare hills on our eyeballs."

"Once free of the wilderness we shall sing to a better tune," said Korah with a laugh. "Out of green valleys shall spring better songs than these."

But even as he spoke, the song ceased, and a man was seen running back from the advanced guard. "There are armed men," he cried, "who bar the way." When he had gathered breath and stood before Korah, he said, "I think Phinehas is there and his guard."

"Will they not even suffer us to go our own way in peace?" said Korah bitterly. "Then we must fight, for never will we return."

Dathan and Abiram ran forward to set their men in order for the battle, but hardly had they done so when another messenger came running from the rear, saying that yet another force was

approaching from the right flank, and in a few moments would be upon them.

There was not time for Korah to rally his men on the two fronts; and as Phinehas attacked from the north, so Joshua closed in upon the flank. Hampered by the presence of women and children, who were screaming and calling out in their fear, the followers of Korah did their best to use their weapons, but in the face of the double onslaught, they could do little, and soon were in flight.

Yet even now might many of them have escaped into the hills, had not the way of their escape been barred by a great rift in the ground, too wide for the longest to leap, and too deep for any man to see bottom. Here, on the bitter edge, they turned for a last resistance; but not for long. First the women and children, being the weakest, were forced backwards screaming into that dark rift, but soon the bodies of husbands and fathers were tumbled upon them, bleeding and broken. Joshua, remembering the words of Moses, gave order that not one man, woman or child should be left alive.

From the blazing noon of that destruction, the sun turned again towards the west, and the men under Joshua and Phinehas went back to the camp. They spoke of the destruction of Korah and his followers as of a thing so sudden as to seem swifter than the work of man; the ground had indeed

seemed to open and swallow them. Men spoke in whispers to one another and were afraid; and in the night, when they looked out from their tents and saw the moon cast her cold light against the black shadows of the rocks, they murmured against Moses, saying: "He has killed the people; he has caused the death of innocent women and children."

IX

Moses did not suffer them to rest. No regret should grow in his heart. He would not look back, but forward. They must march further. A new people should be born in the wilderness; infants should learn to play with the chipped rock as their first and only toys; youths and maidens should learn, on that desert way, the law in whose shadow they lived. All who had come out of Egypt, save those few whose heart was of a different spirit, all who had turned back from Kadesh before the Amalekites must fall and die, and a new generation of the wilderness must arise.

Years passed. He drove them on, wandering through the deserts until at the last he led them back again to Kadesh.

At Kadesh Miriam died.

The people chanted a marching song as they carried her on a rough stretcher made of two branches. Wrapped in her goat-hair cloak, her light, old woman's body swayed as the men marched.

At the grave's edge, they bared her face for the last time to the light, and Moses, looking on the shining, sallow skin, stretched so taut against the forehead and over the cheek-bones, saw again in memory the keen, passionate face, the dark brows, the full lips of the woman who had stood barring his way in the path beside the Pelusiac Nile. The reeds, growing taller than a man, had arched above her, and their shadows in the moonlight were cast across her body. The picture lived only for a moment: it dimmed, and the memory of the wounds of her scourging alone remained. . . . In the desert, under the weight of years, she had withered into an old woman.

She was dead; the dust and rubble was being thrown over her. He would not see her again, for the image in his soul had vanished. In its place had grown something invulnerable and unburiable, something that marched unaltered through the years.

CHAPTER VIII

GOD OF BATTLES

I

BY the aid of a staff, grasped in thin hands, shaking with palsy, Aaron stood in the council of elders. He was lean and bent; his white hair, very fine and silken, flowed over his ears in heavy curls. His beard was as white and soft. He spoke in a gentle and high-pitched voice, "Better avoid violence. Let us send messengers to Edom, asking permission to go through their land in peace." Those who were further from him had to lean forward to catch his words.

"I misdoubt of their answer," said Moses.

"We can but ask; peace is better than war."

"By such request we give warning of our intention," said Joshua, "and should they refuse, they will have time to gather forces against us."

"Better attack at once," cried Phinehas. "Our men are eager, well disciplined and strong for war. As wolves from the desert, they will scatter the sheep of the lowlands."

Moses nodded his head in approval; and while the younger men waited for him, Aaron continued: "In war is the uncertainty of chance. . . . True, we are stronger than we were, but why squander our strength? It were a wrong to assume that the people of Edom will bar our way. The Lord Yahweh will make easy our passage if we walk in justice and mercy."

He paused, and there was a murmur of doubt from the younger men.

Moses, whose bodily vigour had not been so changed by the years of wandering, whose hair was grey, not white, and still had a line of red in it here and there, whose mind and inner fire were as strong as ever, felt a compassionate affection. It was clear that Aaron stood alone; he had always counselled caution and upheld gentleness; for this the people loved him better, Moses knew, than they loved himself. And he, too, loved him, and would not willingly see him overborne by younger men, who, in the hard wisdom of their desert experience, might think his day had passed. "We will send messengers," he said, "as Aaron has advised; if peace prevail, it is well. We will wait and bide their return."

Phinehas muttered under his breath: "Wait and find the country armed against us!" But he did not speak aloud, knowing that Joshua, though his thought might be one with his, would suffer no word against Moses.

Yet Moses was troubled, for even as he gave the order that messengers be sent to Edom, his heart questioned: "Shouldst thou not ask the Lord of Hosts that he direct thee? Why, for thy brother's sake or any man's, harbour a doubt?" He would have answered the voice, had he not thought: "Aaron and myself are old men: the last of our generation; we must hold together."

When the messengers came to the king of Edom, they said: "We come in peace. Thus saith your brother Israel, you have heard of all the travail that hath befallen us; how our fathers went down into Egypt, and we dwelt in Egypt a long time; and the Egyptians evil-entreated our fathers: and when we cried unto the Lord, he heard our voice, and brought us forth out of Egypt: and behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of your border: let us pass, I pray you, through your land: we will not go aside into the fields or vineyards, neither to the right nor to the left, but we will keep to the king's highway that goes through the country."

When the king had inquired their numbers and the purpose of their journey, he thought: "These people cannot pass through my land without eating and drinking. Water is scarce; they will empty the wells, and whatever their leaders promise, they must of necessity, take food as they pass." "No," he answered, "I will not give you leave to pass

through: and, if you attempt it, I will oppose you with the sword."

But again the messengers spoke, saying: "We will keep to the high road and take nothing. The water that we drink we will pay for. Let us only go through on our feet."

The king of Edom thought: that is well enough, but to the north where these people would go are the Amorites; strong in war, who, but a few years ago gave battle to Moab and Ammon and drove them back eastward even beyond Heshbon. What if the Amorites should defeat them also? They will be scattered over my country, and war will come to my people. He said: "Return to your leaders. Tell them on no condition will I give leave to pass my borders."

When the elders of Israel heard the answer, some were eager to press on and fight their way through Edom. Others said: "Too late. We have given them warning: they will combine with the Amorites. What chance have we against so many?"

Bridling their impatience they listened to Aaron for fear that Moses should be angered if they should openly murmur their contempt. "Most certainly," Aaron said, "it is best to avoid conflict. Choose peace where peace is possible. Let us go eastward, till we come to the great trackway leading north by

the edge of the desert. In the wilderness there are few to oppose us."

"Little enough to eat and more weary marches. No. Let us fight our way through. Let us take the short way," cried many voices.

Joshua, rising amidst that hubbub and outcry, waited till they were silent. "The way through Edom is too strong with resistance, but if we strike quickly on the west, we may well win through. The Amorites have heard but a rumour, and will be as yet unprepared."

They shouted their approbation. "We will follow Joshua! North to the land of Canaan! The God of battles be with us! He will scatter our enemies!"

But Joshua in the midst of the applause was unmoved; he looked to Moses for a sign.

Moses said: "I will go to the Tent of Meeting and consult the Lord God."

But the people shouted: "Enough of marching to and fro. We will follow Joshua. We ourselves will scatter our enemies."

Moses again faltered. He gave a sign to Joshua: "Let the trumpets be blown for the advance."

II

Two days' march out of Kadesh, by the way of Atharim, the advance guard fell into ambush, and

those that were not killed were taken captive. Angry at this check, the main army gave immediate battle. The day was hotly contested but by the evening Joshua had driven back his enemies, had captured their camp and taken a large number of prisoners.

That night on the hills to the northward, they could see long lines of beacon fires and could hear the sounding of war trumpets from distant valleys. "We waited too long," said Joshua. "The whole country is armed to bar our progress."

"As we have conquered to-day, so we shall conquer to-morrow," said Phinehas. "The fear of our name shall run like a flame through their hearts."

Joshua watched the fires that sprang up from the hilltops as a warning to distant tribes.

"How many prisoners were taken in yesterday's fight?" questioned Moses.

"Some seven hundred counting women and children."

"They were a fitting sacrifice to the Lord Yahweh," said Phinehas. "Let them be devoted to the God who has given us victory. But let two men be allowed to go free that they may give tidings how those are served who oppose the Lord God."

Aaron raised his thin voice in protest. "A sin to slay those who are innocent. If there is need of sacrifice, have we not beasts whose blood can be offered?"

"What of the prisoners?" asked Joshua. "Are we to let them go free, for we have not the men to guard them."

"Better let them go," answered Aaron, "than commit injustice. They will report that we are just men, and perchance will allow us to go through their land. Let them go, and bid them speak on our behalf to their kinsmen."

"If all those gathering on yonder hill tops were old men with white beards," said Phinehas, scornfully, "such soft ways might move their hearts. They are men gathered for war, and they would laugh and think we were afraid. Did they let loose our men that they took? We shall not show ourselves softer than they, but rather, being more fierce strike terror."

A murmur of approval greeted his words. All eyes looked to Moses for his command.

"Aaron, my brother, is a man of peace, and if it were peace I would add my word to his; but this is war. We are men, we must meet our enemies with their own weapons, and take the land of our heritage by force." With a frown cleaving his forehead, he said sternly: "The Lord Yahweh is a man of war: Pharaoh's chariots he cast into the sea: He alone can subdue our enemies. Make yourselves humble before him. It is written. All shall be given to God. Our lives are devoted to his glory;

and these heathen, knowing not his thought shall give their blood as sacrifice. On the morrow we will march forward."

A shout greeted these words. Joshua gave sign of his assent. Aaron would have spoken, but Moses quelled him with a glance.

That night the prisoners were slaughtered outside the camp, all save the unmarried girls. The name of the place was called Hormah, meaning a sacrifice, devoted to the Lord God.

But on the morrow they stayed their attack, for scouts returning gave account of the number of the Amorites, and the difficulty of the way. Caleb, who had gone farthest into the enemy's lines, said that advance was impossible; so, for another day they waited, listening to the war-trumpets, and at night saw yet more beacon fires on the hill tops. Again they sent scouts, who again brought adverse tidings.

In the council Aaron found more patient listeners and on the third day, following his advice, they turned back reluctantly, and marched south eastward, skirting the borders of Edom.

III

The enemy hung on their flank, and each night the northern sky reddened with beacon fires. "See how Aaron has raised the country with his mild

message," said the people. And Moses, looking back at those following lights, thought: "We must go again into the desert. Twice I have hesitated in weakness. Now God speaks clearly. Our enemies are a rod in his hand."

After three days they came to the red sandstone cliffs near to Mount Hor, and here pitched camp. On a dark night when no moon was showing, Aaron came to his brother's tent, and standing in the entrance by the drawn curtain, called in a low voice: "Are you asleep, my brother?"

From the dark interior Moses answered: "I do not sleep when yonder fires are burning."

"May I enter?"

"Yes, but leave the curtain drawn. . . . Here is a couch beside me where you can rest."

Aaron lay down upon the couch, and after he had remained silent in the darkness, he said: "I am an old man who has marched far, and I can go no farther." The only sound breaking the silence was that of the naked feet of the sentry as he turned at the end of his beat, paused and went back again. After a while Aaron said: "I am content, knowing that the people will go farther than my strength can measure. I had lived in Egypt too long as a slave, before you roused me. I have glossed with the word caution a slave's cowardice."

"Nay, not so," said Moses. "It was you made

possible their revolt; you they followed when they would have stoned me for my quick temper."

"If I have helped them, I am rewarded; but they need me no longer," said Aaron. "Conciliation is at an end. They follow your manhood, and the way you will go is one of bloodshed, violence and many battles; I have travelled far enough. . . . You are silent, why should I live longer to find myself unwanted . . . ? One thing only: Tomorrow come with me to the great hill yonder. My strength will carry me that far. Let me look northward to the land God has promised; I shall be content."

"And I?" Moses asked. "Must I go on alone?"

"Your strength suffices."

"My brother, stay with me for a little. We alone remain of the old generation. How can I go on alone?"

"God will sustain you."

"The face of God changes," said Moses. "The law I have cut on his tablets contain not the whole of his thought. His words are not as men's words. That which I am has led me beyond touch of the past, and now, but for you, I am alone. The promised land is distant. . . . Yonder, the watch-fires of our enemies . . . ! Aaron, stay with me, give me your hand, lie beside me on this couch. . . . To-

morrow have your will. Only this night stay with me."

In the morning they went with Eleazar up on to Mount Hor, and when Aaron had looked over the valleys which stretched towards the Dead Sea, he went into a cave and sat down to rest. "Help me take off my garments, and put them on Eleazar, my son, who shall be High Priest in my place. May his be a stronger will, a less cautious mood."

Eleazar, a man of middle age, grey bearded and with small, shrewd eyes, looked on his father's shaking hands, his lined, thin face and smooth, white beard, and thought: "He is the last of the old men come out of Egypt, and his hour has come. Moses alone remains, and he is not a man as other men, but like this desert, like this red, bare hill on which he stands, like a great wheel of fate that of itself rolls on and on; yet he will also die: and then we sons of Levi will lift up our heads and take our place in Israel."

When they had stripped from Aaron his High Priest's garment, and his thin body was clad only in his inner shift, he leaned against the rock, and said: "Now leave me, I have come far enough. No enemy will think to look for my bones here."

Moses, who was standing in the mouth of the cave, with brows bent in a frown, watching a distant bird rise on wide spirals, did not speak again. In

the tent's darkness he had already bidden him fare, well. Eleazar stooped to kiss his father's hands and ask his blessing.

When the last words had been said, Moses, whose expression had remained as unchanging as his body's posture, led the way from the cave and without looking back, strode down the hill toward the camp. The High Priest followed, not daring to break upon the silence of his leader.

IV

To shake off their enemies that hung upon their flank, they marched south-eastward. In the flint-strewn desert north of Midian, they were alone once more with only the kites above them and jackals barking in the night, prowling the outskirts of the camp. They marched till they struck tracks of Bedawyn nomads pointing north, east of Moab, towards Ammon; these they followed.

It was a rough track, not often used: long marches between the wells, and often the well-heads skilfully hidden and hard to find. In that wilderness came the last bitterness of those who had wandered for too long. "Surely we are come to Sheol, where God is not," they cried.

"Look well," Moses bade them, "Behold, even here the face of Yahweh in the wilderness. Even

here, see him where he is terrible and stripped of mercy."

They answered: "On these burning rocks our feet bleed to no purpose," and to each other they complained: "By slow torment Moses destroys us. He is as cruel as Yahweh. . . . Korah had been done to death. Miriam is dead. Aaron is dead. . . . Our bones are scattered as the dust. Twice have we turned our backs on the promised land. . . . God has forsaken us."

As hope died and the vision of their fair inheritance became fainter, the desire of flesh grew stronger. In that flint-strewn desolation, their lust seemed like a serpent bred of the heat; like a serpent, its bite poisoned their thirsty bodies. Lust grew to a fiery madness. Honourable fathers turned aside after their neighbours' wives; clamped in fierce embraces they neither gave nor found satisfaction. Men and women died cursing one another. Yet through the waste from Zalonah to Punon, from Punon to Oboth, Moses urged them on. They marched from habit and without hope.

Journeying northward on the eastern border of Moab, the land grew less desolate; here they met tribes of the sons of Lot, leading their flocks to the desert's edge. With envy the wanderers looked on the young men so light of step and cheerful, and the women and young girls, sleek-fleshed and

black eyed, and with gold ear-rings flashing behind braided hair.

The children of Israel questioned one another: "What profit had our father Jacob in stealing the birthright of his brother? We are outcasts, dying of want. Was it for this that Rebekah loved him the better? The sons of Esau were happier than we. When they denied passage of their land, we turned again into the wilderness. See now these children of Lot; their flocks are fat from the good grazing. These men worshipping Baal, Baal-peor and Chemosh live after another fashion." Speaking against Yahweh and against Moses, they continued: "We have had enough talk of the promised land. What does it avail? These people have open hands; the worship of their gods brings increase. Happiness is better than the law. Better to rest in Moab than go further."

They pitched camp at Iye-abarim on the upper reaches of the stream Arnon. When they saw the running water, they lay down and lapped like dogs, and many plunged into the stream to cool their flesh; their lust they could not cool. Many followed the water into the valleys, mixed with the Moabites and worshipped their gods.

At the spring festival, setting example for earth's fertility, the girls of Moab beckoned with dances and gestures. Yet, as water failed to cool their

desert malady, the desire of Israel was unquenched. They went unsatisfied from one to another.

On the night of the full moon, the orb was covered by dark clouds, the troubled sky thundered, the rain fell. The women of Moab loosened their garments and danced. On this night the gods of Baal and Chemosh would lie with Baalath and Astarte, and from those unions earth be renewed.

An hour before midnight, rain ceased and the sky cleared. Pools of silver light lay on the desert; the bodies of naked girls bent over them to drink their fertility from the moon. Then the sons of Israel mixed with the daughters of Moab, even as Baal and Baalath. They were not content to stay in the tents of the Moabites but brought their women back into camp.

Moses thought: "What can I do further for this people? Despair is in their hearts. No word of mine can alter them; they are beyond comfort."

He was on his way to the Tent of Meeting when he met Zimri, son of Salu, struggling with a naked girl.

He paused, divided between anger and pity, and as he stood there Phinehas came running to him and said: "How long are we to suffer such sights?"

Moses did not answer.

Phinehas took his spear, and went after Zimri into the tent where he had gone with the woman,

and he thrust both of them through with one stroke, the man of Israel and the woman through her belly. Their cries roused the camp, and Phinehas with blood splashed on face and hands, called to his followers to slay all those who had joined in the worship of Baal or Chemosh.

Moses did not that night enter the Tent but returned with a heavy heart to his own place, for he knew that neither sword nor spear were remedy. Yet in the morning he went to the Tent of Meeting. In silence he waited, praying that greater evil might not follow the night's slaughter. "Yahweh, help thy people. As though it were a serpent, lust has bitten them in this last wilderness. Their life is turned to destruction. What profit, Oh God, can Moab offer? They have marched too far to find satisfaction with the simple daughters of Lot. Give answer. Cleanse thou them of this serpent's bite."

In stillness the message came: "They that are bitten by desire in them must desire be lifted up that they may see the nature of life that God creates. Make, therefore, an image of the member which is the life. Set it on a standard in the sunlight, that they may raise their eyes and see, and look on it and live."

As he was commanded, Moses made an image of brass and set it on a standard and cried: "Look well and see the fierceness of life and whence it is.

Lift up your eyes to the image which glows and glitters."

And those that raised their eyes found that their flesh was restored to normal health. The serpent was no longer within them for their destruction but was made one with Yahweh. Sharing his holiness, they were no longer divided by a double-mind, no longer vacillating, but strong sons of Israel, continent and formidable warriors.

v

They marched north into fertile land: green rolling uplands where sheep grazed, where the shepherds of Moab watched them as they passed. As they fared farther they came to oak and chestnut groves, to cultivated fields and vineyards. At Bamoth they halted, and Moses sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, saying, Let me pass through: and my people will do no damage by the way, and what we take we will pay for. Sihon would not consent, but gathered his men and went out to meet them in battle. At Jahaz, Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, scattered his forces, and, following hot, went forward and took possession of his land and his cities.

In Heshbon, the city of the king, Moses lodged; and when the prisoners were brought out before him,

and the people of the city begged for their lives, he looked on them sternly and said: "We who have turned the sword against ourselves, will not lightly spare those who stand in our path. As we have done at Hormah, so shall we make a *herem* to the Lord God of Battles. Every male shall be killed and every male among the little ones and every woman that has known man by lying with him; but the girls who are virgins we will keep alive for ourselves."

Moses frowned and said to the soldiers: "If you will not drive out and slay all the inhabitants of the land, those that remain will be pricks in our eyes, thorns in our sides: let them be a *herem* to God who has given us victory."

They did as he commanded, and spread over the land occupying the cities and taking the fields and vineyards for their own.

Messengers came from the north telling of Og, king of Bashan; rumour spoke of him as of a giant, a son of the Rephaim and terrible in battle. At the council of war there were some men that argued: "As for Og, he will not leave the borders of his land. He gathers his people for defence. Why should we heed him? We are men; why should we battle needlessly with giants? Let us march to Jordan, cross the river and enter Canaan."

Moses stood in the council. Though he was older by a generation than any there present, his

eye was undimmed and his strength unabated; he said: "Not yet can we enter." Then with a smile and his eye glinting with the light of battle, "Shall we leave Og to threaten our flank? A giant is he? Then he should have kept his name from our ears. Giants are made for our swords. What say you, Joshua?"

Joshua answered tersely: "We leave no enemy unconquered on our flank."

Skirting Ammon, they crossed the river Jabbok and marching to Edrei, here met the forces of Og and defeated them. Into the rich country of Bashan they penetrated, storming the walled cities, slaughtering the people, even the women and little ones as they had done in Heshbon. These they devoted to the God of Battles. When they had cleared the country of all enemies, and the report of their victories had gone into the neighbouring lands, carrying the terror of their name, they marched south again and pitched camp on the east of Jordan opposite Jericho. To the children of Gad, Reuben and Manasseh, Moses had given the lands of their conquests, but the fighting men of these tribes marched with him to give aid in the conquest of Canaan.

At Pisgah they waited, taking a census of the tribes, preparatory to the crossing of the river.

CHAPTER IX

EAST OF JORDAN

I

WHILE the census was being taken, conflicting opinions divided the camp. Some said it was ill to number their strength—better go forward with powers that remained unknown; others declared Yahweh himself had given the order to Moses; unless they knew their power to the last man, they might not cross the river.

While thus contesting, tidings came of Balaam, whom, so rumour said, Balak, King of Moab, had summoned to curse them. Of Balaam, the man of solitary power and mysterious sciences, strange tales were told. Few men had seen him. Some said that in the desert where he lived, he took his food from the hand of God, and some that he was an evil magician living among rich meadows and vineyards, exacted from the kings who feared him.

As rumour grew and swelled through the camp, the children of Israel watched daily for his coming; and when they saw groups of strange men against the skyline, they said: "It is he: the sorcerer."

Spies sent by Phinehas found Balak with his princes on the hill top. Two of their number returned with tidings of what they had seen. Others remained to gather further news.

A fire of fear spread, as when dry grass blazes. Balak, with all his princes was there, and with him Balaam, who had indeed come to curse them, as they had feared. The spies had seen him; a man of huge bulk, of dark complexion, the skin of his face shining in the sunlight. He wore a long purple robe, lined with lamb's wool. Balak, they said, was like a boy before him, doing obsequiously his command, going between him and the men that built the altars, seeing to it that the work was to his liking. On each of the seven altars, he would sacrifice a bull and a ram, ere he cursed them.

With these tidings Joshua and Phinehas came to Moses. They found him seated alone, as was his habit of late, at the back of his tent; when he had heard the news he said: "It does not surprise me. Balak grows fearful. He dare not meet us in arms, so takes a more dangerous path. . . . Well, what would you have of me ? " he asked.

"What is your command ? "

After a short silence, in the same querulous tone of an old man, he said: "I cannot stop his mouth, can I ? "

"The people are afraid."

"What is Balaam that they should fear him?"

"He is not only a sorcerer," said Joshua, "but a man of God, so I have heard tell."

Moses frowned. "See to it that they control their fear," and he gave a gesture of dismissal.

"What if he should curse us?" Joshua dared.

"That is our peril."

"The people are afraid."

"Speak not of fear. We must bide the issue; I cannot stop his mouth." After resting in thought a while, Moses continued: "Though Balaam lives not by armed strength, kings fear him. He comes against us after our victories, greater and more to be feared than Sihon and Og. Men and giants I have vanquished, yet against Balaam I cannot raise my hand."

"Would you not make a prayer against him?"

"I will not move so far as my tent door to have sight of him. He must do as he must."

"Is there no way we can prevent him?" urged Joshua.

With his smouldering irritability flashing into anger, Moses said: "Trouble me not. Be gone." Then in a milder tone, as Joshua stiffened against the rebuke: "Joshua, stay with me. Phinehas, see that the census is completed. Keep the people busy; make tasks for them."

When alone with Joshua, he said: "Stand at the entrance; tell me what you see."

"From three altars smoke rises, and even now fire kindles on the fourth."

"Be my eyes when I shall need them."

With head bent, and with arms folded, gripping his elbows with his strong hands, Moses remained in thought. After a long silence: "In Egypt, in the temple of Osiris, I studied mystic learning. There is a power the priests tell of, which must confront each man with curse or blessing ere he enter his inheritance. . . . Balaam is such a power. . . ." Hammering his words with slow emphasis: "I have delivered them from Pharaoh, guided their steps to Sinai, have led them through the wilderness, even to this place, and yet" Changing his tone and looking at Joshua with milder glance: "My task is done. A new nation has come out of the wilderness." Then seeing that Joshua had turned and was not heeding, but was watching the hill-top, his words trailed into silence. "God alone . . . blessing . . . cursing. . . ."

"See how he climbs still higher. He will have none beside him," Joshua called.

"I will not look on him."

"Why not?"

"I will not."

"Is he indeed so powerful?"

Moses muttered in his beard: "The last danger."

Then Joshua turning, and seeing Moses as an old

man, huddled in the corner of his tent, spoke from his younger confidence: "Despite his curse, we will cross Jordan."

"'Tis well you say so, for in my heart there is doubt. I do not know whether I shall cross or not."

"Oh, Master, look ! He stands now quite alone."

Moses following his thought continued: "If I may not enter, you shall lead them."

His attention caught back by these words, Joshua turned, and taking quick steps across the tent, stood beside Moses. "What ails you ? May I raise you up ? Lean on my arm. You, you as always, shall lead them. You are God's prophet. I am your servant. Come, Master, take my arm. Confront him, and defy his power."

"Nay, leave me where I am."

"Is it the curse that falls on you ? "

"Only my own need."

"Speak, tell me of it."

"Doubt grows slowly, though suddenly it comes to flower."

"What mean you ? "

"I am an old man; God does with me as he will."

Then, smiling at Joshua's perplexity, "Go back: look again at the hill-top and tell me what you see."

"Smoke rising from all the altars."

"Can you see Balaam ? "

"He lifts his arm. His voice is on the wind."

A hush had fallen on the camp, for all the people had seen the smoking sacrifices, and Balaam on the cliff's edge. This stillness of all usual activities, like a calm water, seemed to surround the tent, making its silence the more profound.

II

The spies that remained had seen the sacrifices on the altars, and had seen Balaam go apart on to the cliff's edge, and had heard his great voice carried on the wind; and when they had trembled in expectation of his curse, instead of his curse they had heard his blessing. They had witnessed the anger of Balak, and heard his oath that on the morrow he would build seven new altars, and that Balaam should curse Israel from the sacred grove of Peor. In the evening, mingling with the camp followers, they listened to their talk.

Enos, an old man, clad in raw goat-hides, told his son Tivas and two others how Balak had sent for Balaam.

Leaning forward toward the fire where the pots were cooking, warming his hands and holding back the pelts from his bare legs that they might feel the warmth, he said: "With good reason the king was afraid. He said: 'See how this multitude come out of Egypt, like a swarm of locusts from the

south, they destroy all things; they lick up the nations as an ox licks up the grass.' He sent princes with gifts to Balaam that he night come and curse them."

"What said Balaam?" asked Tivas.

"He said he would not come. That was his answer. But the king sent again, and with the princes Accad and Resen, he sent Rue and Serug. They came to Balaam with the gifts of divination in their hands and said . . ." The old man paused and looked into the fire.

"What said they, father?"

"Curse this people, thus saith Balak, for they are too mighty for me. He whom thou blessest is bleſt, and he whom thou curseſt is curſt. Do this and I will give you great rewards. . . . But was Balaam to be bought with promises?"

"Know you what he said?"

"Balaam said: 'If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do more or less.'"

"That was a blunt answer to give the king."

"Indeed it was; and one befitting the man that he is. He bade them stay the night, and, in the morning, said he would go with them, but he gave no word, mark you, of what he would say."

"'Twas a long journey, so I've heard."

"Men say," said Tivas, "from Pethor, on the great river, four hundred leagues . . . that he

floated by magic arts, bearing the princes with him through the air."

"That is only a story," said Enos, waving it aside with his hand, "only a tale men tell. He came, if truth were known, from not far distant, riding on his ass. A great she-ass of no ordinary breeding, strong to bear the weight of such a man. Ay, did you hear her bray when she saw the king? An ass whose strength waxes with her age, for she has borne him this thirty years and more, men say." He moved his hand in a half circle towards those who listened and nodded his head. "Listen, this is the truth I tell you. I had it from one of his own men. It is the truth, though the princes say nothing of it, lest it should anger Balak."

He paused for emphasis, and again looking round to be sure that all were listening: "You have seen how the Lord will not suffer the sons of Jacob to be cursed. He will not suffer it. As Balaam was riding hither, an angel placed himself in the way."

"An angel, say you?"

"Ay, an angel. . . . Balaam saw him not, but the ass saw him with his drawn sword in his hand, and she turned aside and went into a field. Balaam smote the ass to turn her into the way again. But at a distance further the angel again stood between two vineyards with a wall on either side. The ass thrust herself against a wall and crushed Balaam's

foot; and he smote her. There was no way to turn to the right nor the left, so the ass lay down under Balaam, and again he smote her with his staff. They that were with Balaam have said that then it was that the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she turned and said: 'What have I done that thou hast smitten me?' Balaam answered: 'Thou hast mocked me; would that I had a sword to kill thee.' And the ass said: 'Am I not thy ass, that thou hast ridden all thy life long, was I ever wont to do so unto thee?' Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes and he saw the angel standing in the way with his sword in his hand."

"He saw the angel and lived?"

"Ay, and Balaam fell on his face; and the angel said: 'Unless the ass had turned aside, I would have slain thee. Thou shalt not curse Israel.' Then those who were with Balaam heard him say: 'I will return,' but the angel said: 'Not so. Go with the men; but only the word that the Lord shall put into thy mouth, shalt thou speak.'"

"That he has spoken," said Tivas.

"On the morrow he will bless them again," said the old man. "Balak but wastes the oxen that he sacrifices, and the rams."

The spies of Israel, listening, took heed of all that was said, but they did not speak, for not willingly would they be questioned in return.

III

As fear had been brought by the first messengers, so joy by those that came later. From mouth to mouth the report went: "He has not cursed, but blessed us: now he has returned to his own country. Balak is angry. What does his anger matter? Balaam has blessed us." They crowded about the spies and led them to the central space and bade them tell their tale.

They told of the sacrifices and of how Balak himself had slain the oxen, of how Balaam had gone apart and how the words of his great voice had been carried to them on the wind: "From Ammon hath Balak brought me, from the mountains of the East to curse Israel. How can I curse whom God hath not cursed? From the top of the rocks I see him, and he is a people separated from the other nations. I see him not as he is now, but as he will be: a star shall come out of Jacob, a sceptre out of Israel. He shall break down the sons of Sheth: Edom and Seir shall be his possessions. May my end be as his; let me die the death of the righteous."

This they reported as they had heard; and the elders called for scribes that the words should be set down. The spies told of the anger of Balak, how he had reproached Balaam, and how Balaam

had answered: "Must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord puts into my mouth?"

They repeated the tale that Enos had told, and how, on the next day, Balak went to the top of Peor, and built new altars, and made sacrifice, and again bade Balaam curse them. Balaam answered: "God is not a man that he should lie, nor will he take back his promise. He hath said, and shall he not keep his word? I have been commanded to bless. God has blessed, and I can not reverse it. There is no calamity in Israel. Brought from Egypt by the hand of God, Israel rises as a lion, and shall not lie down till he eat of the prey, and drink of the blood of slain."

They told how Balak had beaten his hands together in vexation and had cried: "If you can not curse them, do not bless them, but return to your own place, I had thought to promote you to great honour, but God has not allowed. Go."

They were made to repeat the story, the people pressing close.

Moses stood on the outskirts of the throng; they did not heed him, but listened only to the messengers and the tale that they told.

IV

From the tumult of the camp, Moses went apart. The seclusion of the Tent was not sufficient, its

curtains did not shut out the sound of the marching army.

As he walked alone, he found himself talking aloud. A sign of old age, he thought. "I am an old man and my day is done. Their looks say I am the last of the old men; they see the time when I shall be no more.

"Why did I tell Joshua I might not cross the river? I had thought to lay my bones under the tree where Abraham spoke with the angels."

As he walked with quickened pace, his thoughts also moved with larger steps: Balaam blessed and did not curse. Had he cursed, they would still need me. He blessed, and I am free to wander where I list. . . . Though Joshua protested, he easily took command. Like a fig, over-ripe, I fall at a touch; my hour is near. . . . I have seen the swallows go north in spring-time: I would not hold life beyond its span."

He paused in his quick stride, and resting against a rock, still muttered in his beard: "What should I do in Canaan who have taken the wilderness to my heart? On Sinai's silent peak I have spoken with God. He uttered the I AM, and bade me lead the people out of Egypt. . . . Through all our wanderings, his promise was my hope, my goal, my task. . . . And must I now stop short . . . ? Thoughts, like the sea, closing on Pharaoh's chariots, bear me down and carry me away."

Oblivious to all around him, he gazed with look turned inward. Then rising again out of his deep thought, he saw, as though out of a darkness, or a mist, his spread hand on the rock on which he leaned. The veins were raised in ridges from the withered flesh, and between the sinews were sunken valleys. "It is my hand," he thought, "and has been mine, for nigh an hundred years. Like the grass when it is cut down, it is faded; like the grass will pass to corruption, and from corruption to air and water. I can move it. It obeys my will. . . . I have been: and I am. . . . Through habits, grown stiff with long observance, through the clash of wars, the rigour of the march, I have forgotten. . . . Will He speak again?"

Lifting his head and looking round, he saw the lower slopes of Pisgah, and, over the pale rocks, staining them with their brilliance, there spread acres of crimson anemones. Beside him a stream trickled between fringed banks, and from the clefts there sprang small purple cyclamen, and at the edges of the stones pricked green spears of grass. Raising his eyes, he looked further than the crimson flowers to the blue haze beyond the river. Speaking aloud, he asked the silence: "May I not enter?"

From the silence came the answer as from Sinai: "Thou shalt not."

“ Why not ? ”

“ On thy own heart, thou hast written: Thou shalt not.”

“ Shall I not teach them the law thou hast decreed ? ”

“ Thy task has conquered thee.”

“ I have striven for goodness and justice.”

“ They are beyond thee, not in thyself.”

“ I have fought and conquered to establish thy law.”

“ Thou hast sacrificed the innocent with the guilty.”

“ Must I, like a stone, for that sin, sink into the depth ? ”

“ Thy goodness weighs thee down.”

“ Should I not strive for goodness ? Oh, bitter exaction.”

“ Be as I AM.”

“ And thou ? ”

“ I am not good, nor better nor best: I stand apart.”

“ Now most of all would I enter,” cried Moses

“ Why may I not cross the river ? ”

“ Ask thy own heart.”

“ It was for their sakes, not my own that I abandoned Thy solitude.”

“ They shall enter, but thou shalt not.”

“ Was it for this that thou didst command that I should write thy holy law ? ”

“That the nation should live.”

“If I had not written?”

“They would not have prospered. I raise all creatures out of their own to my perception.”

Moses was silent, gazing at the blue distance beyond the river. As he stood beside his rock, the sun moved imperceptibly to the west, till the slanting rays fell on his face, dazzling his eyes. “I may not enter,” he said, “but I shall bless them ere they go.”

v

Under a great awning, Moses sat at a table with a stylus in his hand, and with papyrus spread before him. Most of the tents had already been struck; the gear of the camp, packed into bundles, littered the ground. This shelter only, reserved for the use of Moses and Joshua, had been left standing till the last. On the long trestle-table were scrolls of papyrus, rolled and put aside, and open in front of Moses was one on which he was still writing. His look was mild and clear. A smile played on his lips.

While he was still bending over his work, Joshua entered, and as Moses looked up to greet him, he said: “I have given the order as you directed. Within half an hour the trumpets will sound. The

tribes of Simeon and Levi will lead the van: Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin follow; these under Phinehas. Under Caleb are Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun; Dan and Naphtali are the rear-guard. All is ready; they wait your coming."

"I have nearly finished. This is the last scroll," said Moses. "I have but made corrections," he added with a smile, "where I should have rewritten. The men that come after me must refashion my laws. . . . See, they are in order. That scroll nearest your hand is my journal of the march from Sinai to Heshbon. That beyond it, from Egypt to Rephidim. Those three yonder are of Aaron's writing: laws that he was at pains to make perfect. . . . Here are the ten words of Yahweh. I have them as a copy of the stone tablets in the ark. This here is my calendar; I would have you preserve it carefully. It is an elaboration of the work of the astronomer Ti of Memphis. The writing of it has filled for me many an evening in the wilderness when the day's march was done. The movements of sun, moon and planets are accurately recorded. Take care of it. It should be of value to our people. . . . This other that I have here is an address that I had thought to read as you went forward; but I think it is too long and would weary them. I have a mind to destroy it . . . but no, take it, and in the land where

you are going, it may be of service as a remembrance. . . . A passage or two that I have in my mind I shall speak when I say farewell. . . . These others, they are not of much importance. . . . I think I shall destroy them."

"Dear Master, destroy nothing," said Joshua, putting out his hands for the scrolls. "All that you have written shall be preserved. They will be a precious memory for all generations."

"Very well, since you have taken them, do as you think best," said Moses. "But let them not weigh too heavily. If I should to-day write them again, they would be different."

"You would not change the laws?"

"Life changes."

"Do not say so to the people; they would not understand. . . ."

Moses, with an open gaze, met the anxiety of his minister. "They are going to a better land than Egypt," he said, "a holier land than Sinai. Yahweh will be with them."

"I fear for them," said Joshua.

"Have no fear."

"Oh, Master, why will you not come with us? Reverse your decision. There is yet time."

But Moses shook his head.

"Are we to leave you alone to die on the hill-side?"

"Aaron died alone on Mount Hor. His was a good death."

"He was a feeble old man," answered Joshua, "failing of breath and heart-beat; his hour had come . . . your eye is clear, your voice firm. Be our leader still."

Moses lowered his glance, letting it rest on his hands that were folded before him on the table. "My task is finished. I have written the Law, but may not carry it across the river. In solitude I will remain."

Joshua, who had stepped nearer, once more pleaded: "Come with us."

Moses rose from his seat. "Listen, the men are shouting in their ranks. They are impatient. I will give them my blessing and farewell. Order that this awning be rolled and packed. . . . Let all be ready." Then with a gesture of impatience: "Ah, speak no more. It is my will and happiness to remain."

They stood aside while men came to roll the awning and carry away the table and stools, then when the ground was clear, Moses took his friend by the hand, and smiling, said: "Come, stand beside me while I speak to the people, and at a sign from me go take your place as leader. But now while we are yet apart, bid me farewell."

When they had kissed, Moses said: "When I have finished speaking to them, order them to march forward, and, lest I curse him, let

no man come back to search where my bones may lie."

VI

Moses, with Joshua beside him, stood upon a terrace that overlooked the plain; Israel, in marching order, waited his command. In the front ranks were the captains in groups about their standards. Farther back was the main army—the men with swords at their sides, spears in their hands, and knapsacks strapped on their backs. At a still farther distance were the women and children in loose formation; at the rear, the pack animals and those who tended them. Beyond these, stretching as far as eye could see, were the flocks of sheep and goats and the herds of oxen which had been won as spoil from Bashan. Shepherds and stockmen watched with hands raised to their brows, shading their eyes, that they might see Moses as he blessed the people.

The trumpets sounded, and the murmuring was stilled. In the pause that followed, Moses lifted his voice:

"You stand this day a nation before the Lord your God; your tribes, your elders, and your officers, even all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives: see to it that you enter into the covenant of the Lord your God. Our God is One God, and you shall love Him with all your heart, with all

your soul and with all your might. Do not turn aside after images. Remember the blood shed when you worshipped the Golden Calf. Remember the destruction of Korah."

He paused for a while, and the sound of the moving multitude and their mingled voices as they spoke with one another came up to him. He raised his hand and again they were stilled.

"God spoke out of the fire of Sinai the ten words of his mouth. Hold them in your hearts. Teach them to your children. You are not chosen for your numbers, but for your understanding. By the power of Yahweh you passed dry-shod through the sea, by him you were fed. The land whither you go is not like Egypt, but a land of hills and valleys, watered by the rain of heaven.

"Do not, in times to come, follow false prophets or dreamers of dreams. Bring everything to the test. And this is the law, which I give you; it is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that a man should say, Who shall go up to heaven and bring it down to us? Neither is it distant beyond the sea, that you should say, Who shall go over the sea and bring it to us? But the word is very near, in your mouth as you speak, in the beat of your hearts. Listening, you shall learn to choose between life and good, and death and evil."

Again he paused, and a loud murmur rose from

the ranks, as man turned to man questioning and explaining what Moses had said. Some had not heard clearly, and asked their neighbours to repeat his words; some, hearing, had not understood, and others continued their own thoughts that had been interrupted awhile by the enforced silence. Moses, speaking to Joshua, said: "That is what I wanted to tell them; there is little else to say."

"But you must bless the tribes," prompted Joshua. "That is what they are expecting."

"Yes. I had almost forgotten. Give the command that the standards pass before me."

After the trumpets had again sounded Moses blessed the standards as they passed. "Reuben is blessed. His name shall live; his deeds shall not die. . . . Hear Lord the voice of Judah. . . . Levi is thy ward, O Eternal. Benjamin shall dwell in safety. Joseph's land shall be blessed with precious things brought by the sun and precious things brought by the moon. . . . Zebulun shall rejoice. . . . Issachar shall exult in his tents. . . . Simeon's strength shall be a wonder in the mouths of captains. Blessed be he that enlarges Gad. Dan is a lion's welp. Naphtali shall be satisfied; he shall possess north and south. . . . Asher is blessed with children; he shall never tire. . . . May all the nations be blessed; as your days, so shall your strength increase."

Speaking to Joshua before the people, he said: "From this hour, you are their leader. Be strong and of good courage. Go forward into the land which the Lord has sworn to your fathers. God is with you. He will not fail. Have no fear."

The people shouted, and some wept that they should thus part from their leader, though for the most part their thoughts flew forward to the battle and the storming of Jerico. At the third blast from the trumpets they marched; the earth shook under them; the sound of their passing feet echoed against Pisgah.

Moses watched them pass, and as they went, he thought: "I am yet strong enough to march with them; yet I will not. My heart has heard Yahweh forbid my feet that path; his gifts to me have not only made me strong and wise, but stubborn and proud. Too much has died of my own violence; too often have I struck the rock when I should have spoken gently. I have seen too great a portion of his world as mine enemy; first the Egyptians, though against their idolatry he drove me with no uncertain voice. Then mine own self; a third of my people who died with Korah in the abyss: all that multitude of suffering men and women whose strength failed by the way, whose bones whiten the wilderness: all of mine own generation, even Miriam and Aaron. . . ."

As the standards of Dan and Naphtali passed him, he thought: "Even now I could run after them and overtake them, yet because with them, angry at their mutinies and complaints, my heart has been dark, and often I have forgotten to ask of Yahweh his command . . . because the task that he has laid upon me has been too heavy, I will remain and seek again his light in solitude."

VII

As the last of the rear-guard dipped into the ravine towards the river, Moses began to climb upward, following the course of a small stream; and, where it had worn its bed, he found a path for his feet. Pushing his way between tall growths of fennel, acacia and prickly thorns with small white flowers, he mounted, and came to where plants grew sparsely on short stems, and where red anemones made brilliant the white rock. Along the stream were pale violets and cyclamen.

The sun, as it declined, lengthened his shadow; and, tired at length, he sat down to rest. Looking back, he could see the host of Israel as they debouched onto the plain. Faintly the blast of trumpets came mingled with the lowing of herds. Apart from these distant sounds there was silence. He could see his people moving slowly, as flocks seem

to move slowly in the distance; like a dark stream they flowed westward. Soon they would be gone.

To the south, beyond the valley, were the hills of Moab. On his right, a high shoulder of Pisgah shut out all sight of Canaan, and on the left the ground rose gently to uplands of bare stone, whence he must climb to reach the crest. He would wait a while, for his limbs were weary.

Sudden sleep closed his eyes, and when he woke, the sun had sunk behind the bluff. Refreshed, he rose, and again followed the stream which flowed chattering and bubbling to meet him. In a little while he came to its source; beyond was bare rock, yet the way was not difficult, a slow incline with the arc of the summit showing dark against the sky.

When the ground no longer rose before him, he struck westward to reach that side of the mountain that overlooked Canaan. At the escarpment's edge was a hillock, and here, as he stood gazing into the half light, he murmured: "I can see only dark masses on the sloping hillside surrounded by an enveloping dimness. I must wait till the morning. At sunrise I shall see the land in its splendour."

A pathway made by Bedawyn shepherds skirted the hillock. Following this, Moses was led to a large cave close under the crest of Pisgah. He entered, and could stand upright on the well trodden floor. As his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness

he found a manger and short, sweet hay piled in one corner. "Here I will rest. God has provided a bed for me." He lay down and slept, and in his sleep he dreamed.

He seemed to fall through space, and when at length he came to rest there was before him a many-coloured substance, like a vast sea, through which the waves went backwards and forwards and up and down, so that the depths were revealed and brought to the surface. At first he saw no forms therein, only colour and the blending of darkness and light, but after a little there appeared beasts and plants, merging with human shapes; such as he had seen when God revealed himself on Sinai. Out of the midst came Behemoth, the great dragon with open jaws. Moses would have drawn back in terror but he could not move. He felt the suffocating heat of his breath. The jaws closed, and he was drawn deep under the sea.

Strangely his fear was changed to pleasure. He was a babe again sucking at his mother's breast. There was pleasure in his mouth, and in the cheek that touched the breast, and in his body enfolded by her arms. . . . Pleasure in the drumming of his heels against her side. . . . As an infant he staggered his first steps. . . . What pleasure to grasp the distant objects that his eye had seen. . . . Pleasure in food and touch. . . .

He was a boy in Pharaoh's palace. . . . To shoot with an arrow and hit the mark, to run swiftly, to ride the white warhorse; in these pleasure bubbled and sprang as water in a fountain. To know the meaning of signs, the mystery of sounds, the placing of letters to form the word; all knowledge was a pleasure to his heart.

He was the youth who had gone shyly from the banquet; with fast-beating heart he had answered the beckoning glances of the dancing girl. Pleasure, like flames, had lit upon her mouth and breasts. . . . Down: he went deeper into the sea; deep under, where un-named forces had merged, forming again into the body of the great dragon. Suddenly down, like a jag of lightning, sprang the angel Michael cleaving the sides of the monster; breaking Behemoth in half and lifting his scaly back like a shield whereon was the complete starry sky, and treading the belly and limbs down till they were the dark earth beneath.

Then all was quiet once more, and Moses, as he dreamed, saw himself lying in the cave asleep. Yet in the entrance of the cave the angel waited with a golden rod in his hand, and now said: "The hour of thy death is nigh."

Out of his dream he answered: "I have yet need to live."

"Why shouldst thou stay?"

Though his thought and tongue strove for words, he could not answer.

"Hast thou not tasted pleasure and known the end of it? Is life so precious that thou shouldst cling to its promise like a babe? Is it pleasure that yet lures thee?"

The figure of himself had risen and stood before the angel. He gave a gesture of negation.

"What then?"

But again he could not answer.

"Contend not; thy life lasts only a moment."

With great difficulty, as though his tongue were tied, he articulated: "Not yet."

As he spoke, Michael stepped towards him and touched him with his golden rod, and at that moment he woke.

So vividly was his dream upon him that it seemed that the angel yet stood near threatening his life.

With eyes open to the daylight, he looked around and could see only the rock walls, where tiny ferns nestled and the wide mouth of the cave opened on Canaan.

Eagerly he went to look out, but could see little beyond the immediate rocks, for a haze of hot mist obscured all things.

Throughout the day he sat at the mouth of his cave, thinking about his dream, staring into the mist, hoping to get sight of the land that lay beyond.

He took no food; there was no manna on the hill top, but towards evening he went back to the stream and quenched his thirst; then he returned to the cave.

That night he dreamed again and saw his mother setting the ark of reeds near to the pool where Thermuthis bathed.

As a child he sleeps therein, yet he sees the ark drift on the current, sees it held by some rushes, and sees the princess and her maidens come down from the palace in the early morning. One of them has spied the ark, and gone to it, and calls to Thermuthis, but, as she puts out her hand to draw the ark in, it floats out of her reach. The current carries it into the mid river; it is tossed to and fro, it sinks lower; the water is soaking through the reeds. In a moment it will be submerged.

With it, he sinks. Into the dark river he goes down. He is suffocating in death. Yet at that moment he is pressed into the doorway of life. He struggles that he may live.

With what pain come those first draughts of air. Coughing and sneezing, he gasps to be free of the moisture.

As an infant held in his mother's arms he clutches and cries because he may not grasp what his eye tells of. . . . Fretfully pulling, gnawing the rattle that the princess holds for him, his head aches

with his gums; he feels the anguish of growth, and the resentment of the thing that suffers and knows not why. . . . As a child he cries in anger when his bowl of pap is taken from him by a girl who laughs and tweaks his chin. . . . As a boy he hears the taunts of his companions; a slave and the son of a slave. . . . The anguish of Israel is his anguish; as they are stretched on the scaffold, so is he also. . . . His the curse of weakness, and his the violent deed. He sees the blood-stained body of the taskmaster. . . .

He feels the anguish of the exile: too long had he stayed in Midian. . . . The horror of the plagues, the conflict with Pharaoh, the wailing for the death of the first-born—out of such suffering had his *will* been born.

His was the anguish of the desert march. Pain had lifted him clear of the water, saved him from the river to plant him in the wilderness. There he had wandered. They had drawn near to the Promise, but had turned back again to the anguish of death in the desert. . . .

They had known victory, but with victory injustice. And at the last, the fear of the curse upon the threshold.

From a space beyond the world, on wide wings came the dark-enveloped angel Samael. Darkness neared and knelt beside him, and he could see

only a few stars through the veils of the angel's presence, as though his wings were of cloud. "Follow me."

"By whose power dost thou command?"

Sternly the angel answered: "Wherefore tarriest thou? Hast thou not tasted of all mortal anguish save only that of my sword? Hast thou not known all pleasure save the last pleasure of death? What cause hast thou to linger?"

"Those live who rejoice in the works of The Most High."

"Art thou so boastful? Others praise him; the heavens and earth glorify him every hour."

Then cried Moses. "Listen, Oh, heavens, while I also glorify!"

"Thou shalt answer to me nevertheless," said Samael, "since thou art born of woman, thou shalt feel my sword."

"I will answer only to that which I AM. I am not subject to thee."

Then in his dream he saw his own stature grow greater, as the angel of death drew back into the darkness.

With heart fast-beating he woke, and on the walls of the cave, he saw, as yesterday he had seen, the small ferns in the rock crevices; gazing on their life so insignificant and humble, the dark wings seemed distant.

Moses rose from his couch, went to the cave's mouth, and looked out. Again he could see nothing, for the mountain top was enveloped in cloud, and a fine rain was falling.

All day he sat in the cave gazing into the cloud; he wondered why God had first sent the mist and then the rain to obscure his vision; but later, musing on his dreams, he entered into converse with himself, and thus spoke to his soul:

“Dost thou believe that the angel of death tried to overcome thee ? ”

His soul answered: “How can God suffer it, for thou, through thy long bravery in the wilderness, hast delivered me from death.”

Then thinking of the people who, though they would enter Canaan, would still find occasion for lamentation, he asked his soul: “Will God cause thee to see their trouble and make thee weep with them ? ”

“Thou has delivered my eye from tears. Thy soul shall weep no more.”

“Where wilt thou in the future walk ? ”

“I shall walk in the land of the living.”

Then Moses murmured to himself: “Return, O my soul to thy rest.”

The day passed in stillness and fine rain, but in late twilight came a rushing, sudden wind, such as

had blown across the heavens, when as an exile he had fled from Egypt; before it the clouds dispersed, and, in the fading light, Moses could discern the outline of distant hills. With a joyous recognition such as he had felt in youth, he saw, low in the south, the golden sickle of a young moon, and beneath it the sea, like a blackened mirror, with one ripple of reflected light. The plain was a dim abyss. Above his head, the sky, washed clean by the rain, was lit by the innumerable sparkle of stars.

The silence of day was swallowed in the profounder silence of night. It seemed, as he watched the moon sink behind the hills, as though all time from the beginning to the end of the world was sliding past him into the eternal darkness. To gain assurance of some fixity he looked up at the stars. But as he gazed they were no longer steadfast in their places. Like a swarm of sparks they were flying to the horizon's edge. The world fell with them, spinning as it fell. In that deep silence, their pre-destined courses seemed but a wayward spiral, the ultimate, expanding cloud of smoke, risen from the fire of Yahweh; like smoke, they melted into nothingness.

Was this hard substance rock beneath his feet? Did the mountain still survive? or was he lost in empty nothingness? Sinai was a great mountain, but Pisgah, a crag hung in the abyss.

He had defied the angels; had refused death. For what was he tarrying? In a moment he would be lost, an atom amidst the whirling atoms of space. "Thou who art THAT WHICH THOU ART," he cried, "hold me to myself. Speak."

"What wouldest thou?"

"Life."

"It has been thine."

"Pleasure and anguish are not enough."

"What wouldest thou more?"

"Speak! Tell me."

The answer was silence.

* * * * *

Moses stood firmly with the rock under his feet. He saw the stars following their accustomed course, and remembered the time when, as a youth at Memphis, he had learned their motion. No need for sleep. He would wait, watching for the dawn.

Standing upon the peak above the cave, he saw the east grow pale, saw the night hurrying westward, her twilight mantle, grey and transparent, stretching behind her. Where light and darkness met, colour was born, and over the horizon's edge came first a glow of scarlet, mounting to orange, to transparent yellow, to green, to palest blue. Each, from their separate zones, rose changing and blending, then, as light conquered darkness, faded.

He watched the sun until his orb was drawn clear of the distant hills, then turned to look on Canaan. As he turned, his shadow seemed, for a moment, like a bridge flung from the mountain to the plain. A vast figure it lay across the land, then vanished.

The mountainside, strewn with loose stones, sloped steeply from its crest. Like waves the contours of those hills, which grew upon its flanks, followed one another down to the last outspread flanges of its base. Night yet lingered in those grey valleys, and the great shadow of the mountain spread far across the plain. At its foot flowed Jordan, the river's course marked by dark trees and thickets.

Distant in the south lay the inland sea, and at its edge, Moses could discern the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah, on whose sin fire had fallen. Cliffs pressed close on its dead waters.

From the plain, beyond Jordan, rose Jericho's high walls, and behind them the land sloped to upland pastures, to hills which lay, range behind range, golden in the sunrise.

This was the inheritance of Israel; a joy in their hearts for ever. From the south his eye followed to the west, and from the west to the north. In the valley of Jordan, Abraham had led his flocks. Rich meadows lay yonder where herds could pasture. Olives and figs and pomegranates, would grow beside the river: there would be fields of

flowers, alyssum where bees flew busily from bloom to bloom. A land of milk and oil and honey.

Following the river northward, he saw the white mist of distance out of which it flowed. Then with a wonder which made his heart leap, he saw, beyond the distance, the snow peak of Hermon, rising out of the mist, piercing the blue.

This was the land the Lord had promised.

EPILOGUE

Long after the people had crossed Jordan and had settled in Canaan, there grew legends, telling how Moses died the death of no common man. Some averred that he still lived, and that shepherds gave him reverence and daily brought food to his cave on Pisgah. Others told how the Eternal, bending above him as he lay in the cave, gathered his soul from his mouth; for the mouth which uttered His law, alone deserved the kiss of God. But the greater part of the people said that their fathers knew, from shepherds who had found the cave empty a few days after they had seen Moses enter it, that angels had fetched his body thence to a valley in the land of Moab, and buried it in a place known only to themselves.

THE END

